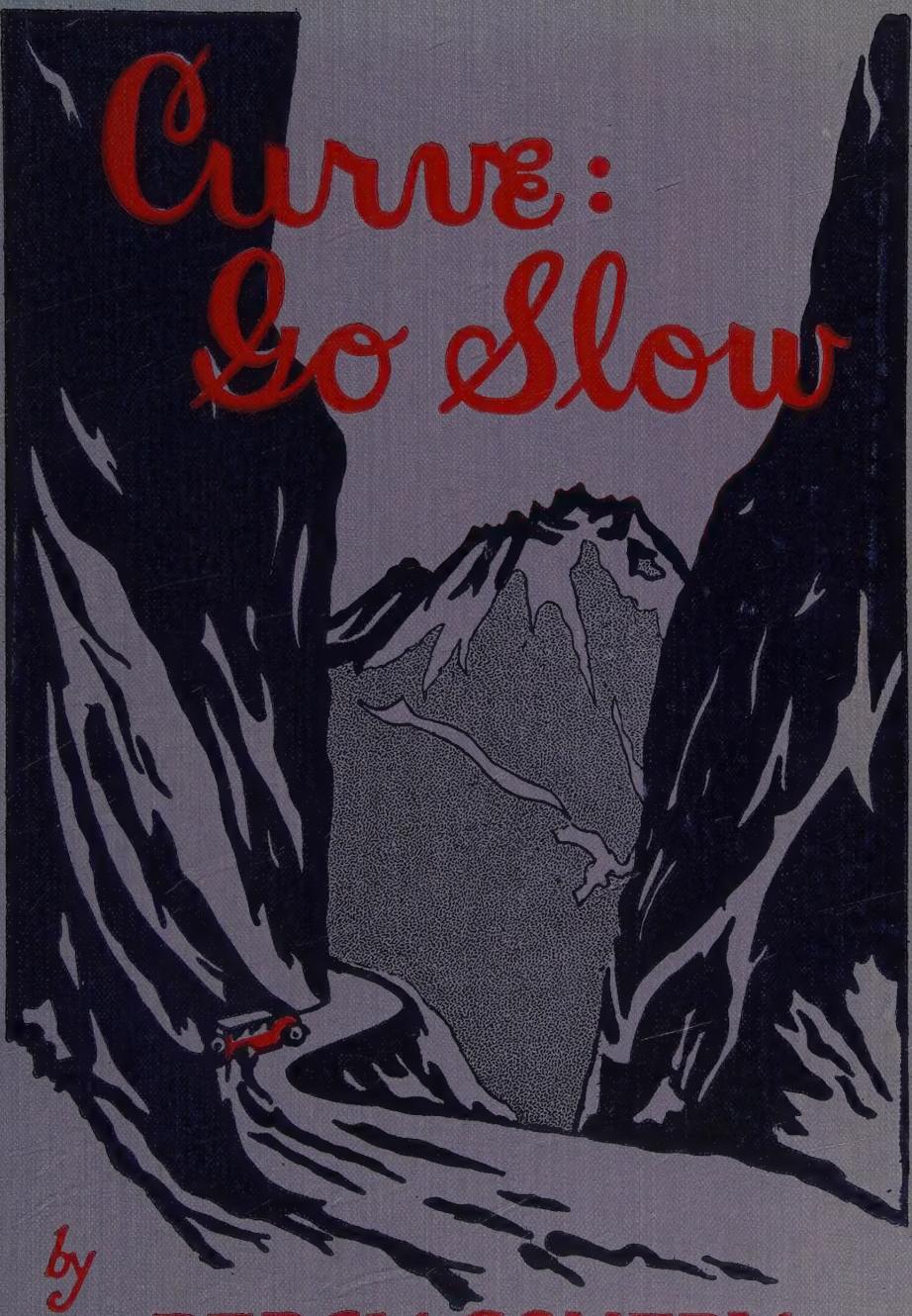
# Curve: Go Slow



by

PERCY GOMERY

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# Curve: Go Slow

Percy Gomery

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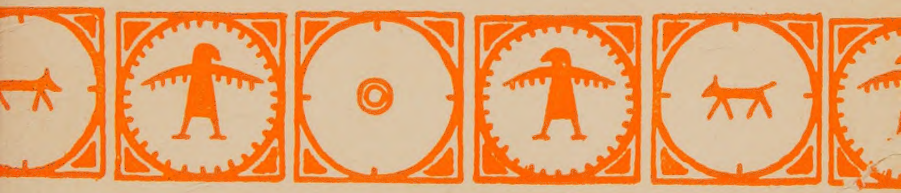
Percy Gomery



*Cover & Jacket by*

Alan B. Beddoe

# CURVE: GO SLOW

By PERCY GOMERY

*The Thunder Bird*

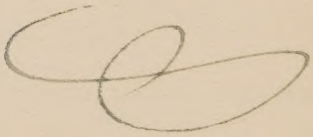
*A Canadian Book of Consequence*

To Mable & Leonard Johnson

from Mr & Mrs Riddlough

Christmas

1929



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# Curve: Go Slow

## A ROMANCE OF PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAYS

PERCY GOMERY

*Pen and Ink Sketches by*
BERNADETTE GOMERY

OTTAWA
THE GRAPHIC PUBLISHERS LIMITED
1927

THE
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG
PORTAGE & BALMORAL
WINNIPEG 2, MAN. CANADA

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*To*
*All wayfaring motorists who risk*
*"The slings and arrows of*
*Outrageous fortune."*

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## Chapter I.

## UNSETTLED, WITH SHOWERS

AFTER ten years of gentle correction in my navigating, I should, of course, have left all the arranging to my wife. When Mrs. Curlew has been on the bridge, our travellings have gone smoothly. Probably that is why her nickname is "The Skipper", and why I am always ready to abide by her orders—except, of course, when anything has to be decided.

By stealthy agency, I had arranged matters to admit of a summer's outing on the Pacific Coast. When her consent was invited, she loftily reminded me of the preposterousness of leaving our two little girls for so long. She also insinuated that, even if the plan were ratified, I would in all probability go on amending it till I spoiled it. The Skipper never would understand why this gay old dog of a world is so likely to wag his tail into the soup after the table has been spread.

On the Tuesday before we were to start, I confessed that I had invited poor old Dum Atwood to share our joys. Her exclamation was just what I might have expected it would be. She more than hinted that my witlessness was just what she might have expected that would be. In fact, her words—calm beyond the point of rebuke—were: "Let me

alone! I'm entertaining myself trying to puzzle out which of you is the bigger dunce."

"John Kemp Atwood's the best friend I've got," I asserted myself. "Even though I'm so much older, he's the only one of my bachelor tillicums that ever stuck to me, and you bet I'm going to stick to him now——"

"Yes, but don't you see, Joe, he'll stick to both of us, like a wet blanket. You promised me that it would all be so glorious, and——"

"——stick to him now that he's turned this nasty corner in life. Dum's got to be cheered up and pulled together, for there isn't enough of his heart left to pull itself together. Can't you see, this affair is like a death in the family for him, except that the dear fellow has no family to share it with."

"But the tone of the thing," cried out the conventional in her. "We're not to blame because—— Oh, nobody's to blame, I suppose." She was striving not to hurt me. "Your poor Dum thought he was married. We thought he was married. Everybody thought it, and then—dear, Oh dear! Of course you can't see that things are any different, but to a woman, they are."

Some women are heroic enough to forgive a man any disgrace he gets into so long as he was "just a boy" and did it all deliberately; but let him get into disgrace innocently, or as the victim of a designing

woman, and they pity him with a pity that is akin to nothing but contempt.

If our fireside council held a chill that evening, it was frozen to the bone next morning when the letter arrived from Aunt Connie, who is the wife of Dr. Dolbrook, the well-known Eastern pulmonary specialist.

"How absolutely crazy of Con," fairly shrieked that lady's sister, "sending Et out here without a moment's warning, and just now of all times. Listen to this: 'The dear child positively refuses to go to South America with her father and I don't want the responsibility of her here in Boston all summer. She needs the change, she seems so depressed and discontented——' No, that's not the part, either. Here: 'If Et leaves New York the day after to-morrow, she'll not be in Vancouver for a week, so I'm writing you in good time if you have to clear out a room or anything.' " The Skipper dropped the letter and sank in a sigh long enough to have embraced a month of troubles. "Nev-er stopped to realize that her letter would take five days getting here, too. Oh, but Con *is* as big a donkey as ever! Et will be in to-morrow night and—— Have we simply got to leave Saturday?"

"Now what *are* you worrying about?" I stood up in swaggering attitude to take the bull by the horns, though realizing fully my chances of being tossed by the bull, so to speak. "You've been solo-

ing the delights of the West to your sister for years. Now, quite naturally, she sends along this girl Et for the summer. Our trip—and we're starting Saturday, don't forget that!—is all planned. Your niece will have to come along, that's all." Then, taking a new grip on the horns and preparing to twist, "For that matter, a party of four——"

"Heavens! I'd forgotten! Daddy, we couldn't do it! It's hardly straightforward. Con's only child, and that man! Just now!"

I felt myself in a death-grip with those horns; the first one of us forced to yield an inch was beaten. In spite of my wife's outburst, the situation was not quite wrenched out of my hands. When the Skipper decides a misgiving instantly her decision is right. With stopped breath, I willed her past the instantaneous stage then, with held teeth, held gaze and held poise (in short, clenching the horns) I awaited her delayed judgment.

"Don't you think perhaps you could hint to Mr. Atwood——?" but she faltered.

"Hint what?" challengingly.

"No, of course not. Not now, you couldn't."

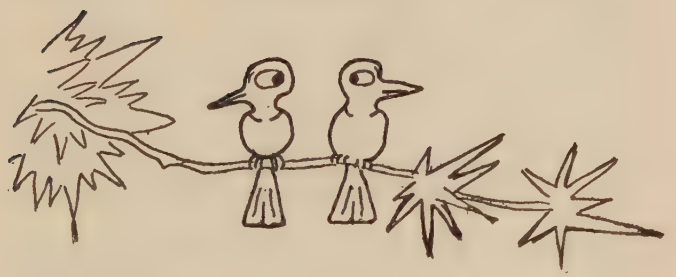
"I should say not! Come along, be sensible. You can't send your niece back home. You can't leave her here alone, nor can you stay with her. And, as for poor Dum, while it won't be quite so satisfactory to him, he's no piker."

"Dum?"

"Yes. He's the one to be considered, isn't he? Poor chap! Think of the mental anguish he's had to go through." At a pinch, a non-committal appeal to a woman's compassion is a safe cast.

"Well—I suppose," came with deliberate study from the Skipper, and I recognized the white flag, "since he has been asked—through your colossal . . . "

But the abuse affected me not at all.



## Chapter II.

## AN EVENING ON TIP-TOE

AT FIVE minutes to half-past ten Thursday evening, the Skipper and I stared expectantly along the darkly gleaming rails. Hard-breathing puffs of steam came from locomotives strutting to and fro on side tracks, as though awaiting a starting gun. Several large steamers lay just across, their triple decks aglow, ready also to be off. Then, at two minutes to half-past ten, the top corner of a large warehouse in the notched skyline rose for a second into sharp silhouette, a bullet of glare stabbed

the night and the Toronto Express, after rolling across the continent four days and nights, rumbled to a halt, with thirty seconds of her scheduled time unelapsed.

Neither of us had seen Et since she was seven years old, standing rather smaller than the average, round-legged and alert. Every game was a laughing game, but defeat brought a gleam of rebellion in the wide brown eyes. One day at their home I had sat reading on the veranda. Dr. Dolbrook lay in the hammock, his suddenly aching forehead covered with a wet cloth. The mother, leading her over-dressed child by the hand, crossed on her way to an afternoon party. Pausing at sight of the white cloth, Connie stepped aside with a formal murmur of sympathy and touched it with daintily poised glove-ends, and smiling in sweet apology as though stooping further might have disturbed her faultless toilette.

"I'm not going!" rebelled the child, stamping her foot and tossing aside her mother's hand.

"But, darlingest, I've promised for you, you know. And," shaking a finger, "ice cream!"

"I don't care. There won't be anybody to put daddy's headache towel under the tap."

"Little Et shouldn't talk to ma-ma that way!" Then, readily accepting defeat, and lifting her chin in farewell adoration, "Child, child! How beautiful you are!"

While we watched the train unload, I was wondering what the pair of them might have made of her.

The Skipper went ahead into the crowd and presently I became fascinated by the angry nostrils of a great whale of a person evidently furious that nobody had met her. When she caught me staring I endeavoured to bury my smile in my necktie as I turned and almost collided with an unnoticed figure standing in the lee of the whale. I dodged in time to meet the Skipper running up the now almost-deserted platform.

"Can't you find Et?" she screamed. "Aren't you doing a thing?"

The next moment my wife and the unnoticed figure were in each other's arms, and presently Et herself, trying to make a smile of a pout, came over and bestowed a kiss on her Uncle Joe, a non-warming unappealing kiss which left me for some reason glad to hand her back. When she had turned away, the picture in my memory was mostly eye-lashes—heavy, curling and far down when she sighed wearily. Looking at her as she walked ahead, Et was not only a little person, but her well-fitting clothes trimmed her to inconspicuousness. The average man, to save his life, could not separate garments of the late '90's from the early '10's, but let him catch sight of a woman of fashion and unexplainably he recognizes her instantly.

Et's conversation from the rear as we drove home was not reassuring.

"Enjoy it? No!" with a puff of laughter that barely saved it. "I should have liked it but I couldn't somehow. I've read romances about those prairie farms, but I certainly can't believe the stories about highly-educated young Englishmen going there and being happy. Now that I've seen England and this funny West, I have no hesitation in saying that it doesn't com-pare with England—or even our own New England."

"Perhaps," soothed the Skipper, "if there had been some understanding person along to explain—"

"Explain! Some talkative woman every now and then did try to tell me about it, but what is there to explain about balls of withered sage-brush blown against wire fences, a few totally ungroomed people, rusty Ford cars and endless hours of bare land?"

"But the mountains?" Plainly her hostess was discouraged. "Surely you loved the mountains?"

"O-o-o-h!" Et sighed. "They were overpowering. It seemed as if the world had been blown up and left in appalling disorder to prevent anybody ever reaching the Pacific. They kept on and on till I was sure the train wasn't trying to get there at all, but was going round and round in some conspiracy to drive me mad. I looked away from the terrifying cliffs up in the sky and saw something creeping, about a mile below. When I realized it was another train on a track where ours had to go, I felt weak. 'Hea-

vens!' I told myself, 'what kind of crazy men ever came here in the first place to bring a railroad.' "

"You'll think differently about it by the time you go back," consoled her aunt. Et shuddered and relaxed in a breakers-ahead fashion. "You've been out of the mountains the last few hours, you know."

"Have I? I was nervous when it got dark tonight and kept my face glued to the windows. All I seemed to be seeing was trees, and rocks, a white road and more trees—millions of miles of them. People behind me in the car were talking and laughing and even playing cards, and I wondered how they could do it."

The Skipper's arm was around Et's shoulders, petting the girl. We passed some vacant lands where unsightly burnt tree-trunks rose out of rank weeds, crooked limbs and hollow knot-holes against the city's light, reminiscent of the demoniacal prisoned spirits in Dante's Inferno. This fresh sight was too much.

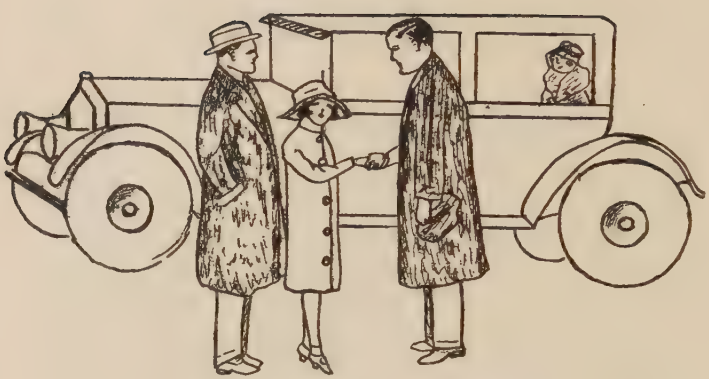
"Oh, auntie," she sobbed, "why is the world so big and terrifying? Whatever made people want to leave their homes that were civilized and comfortable and come out to this awful West. I can't stand it; I don't believe I can stand it. How—how do you stand it? Tell me, auntie, am I a rotten little coward?"

"Of course, my dear," one of the Skipper's happiest peculiarities is the ability, at a bad moment, to

smile unoffendingly, "you won't have to stand it unless you wish."

"I'm sorry!" Et straightened proudly and dabbed her nose. "It's homesickness and just because you're one of my own, I suppose, that I've given way. Daddy always says that the Dolbrooks go through with things. I'm not afraid—anyway—any more."

They say that one woman understands another; but does she? My wife was probably smiling contentedly, while my mind was in the grip of the illuminating suspicion that Et's mental health was affected by an unsuspected malady, that shielding and indulgence had somehow dulled the point of courage and appreciation.



## Chapter III.

## "I DON'T LIKE HIS LOOKS"

IT HAD to be told that she was to be whisked off on a two months' tour of our despised country, but as to when or how the shot was fired, there are no available witnesses. To the Skipper, I ventured to suppose that her niece's writhings under the shock had been, say, distressing, but the shortness of the reply afforded me another hint as to blood being thicker than a husband. "If indeed anything could be thicker than this particular one," my wife's reluctant smile seemed to say.

As, undeniably, I was to blame for adding Dum to our party, it directly followed in feminine reasoning that the blame for the whole thing lay in the same quarter. The Skipper was, I thought, no little aggrieved at lack of confidence to establish this

theory by argument, so contented herself with bestowing upon me a sniff of disgust each time a new point of difficulty presented itself, which was about once every five minutes during that last day of rapidly-to-be-adjusted complications.

When Et herself talked to me about Dum, she was quite composed, though it was clear that she had not learned the important fact.

"I hope he is not too tiresome," she drawled, unconcernedly.

"Most of your men friends are?" I smilingly defied her.

"Not so much tiresome as numerous." The conceit plainly was honest enough. "Men are all very well, I'm sure. They annoyed dad really more than mother and me. And by the way, Uncle Joe," tossing her hair with nervous fingers to cover a shade of embarrassment, "I hope you won't mind having my letters sent on with yours. Some of my friends insisted on having the address." There was a momentary swallowing along the small curved throat under her tilted chin.

"We're leaving a list of addresses," I said.

"This Mr. Atwood—he isn't English by any chance, is he?"

"English?"

"Yes. The English are the only people of culture you have out here, aren't they?"

"Really?" Et's boredom and sentiments were

insultingly natural, but they were natural and it is a mistake to be angered by any sort of natural person. "Dum is pure bred home-grown Canuck, I fancy."

From my office I telephoned the Canuck. It was an invitation and a warning. The invitation—to tour the city with two ladies, starting at four o'clock —he noted and repeated back with his customary exactness; the warning, he analyzed while doing so. His decision he rendered while laying down his pencil.

"Thanks, old chap," briefly. "Sorry you think the girl may take me for a cannibal, but I'm not going to give up the trip, and she might as well look me over to-day as to-morrow. I promise, though, that the first day you count ten over me, I'll start for home."

At four o'clock, therefore, Dum and I pulled up ceremoniously in front of the home grandstand and I led my favourite out for his trials, so to speak, at the high jump. Two females appeared, tailor-attired and wearing a carefully-prepared non-committal smile apiece. Dum and I had alighted and were humbly at attention in a sort of take-your-choice line up. The Skipper might, I conjectured, have wished to drive, with Dum beside her. Had she simply slipped in beside me and tacitly left our two companions of fortune to navigate a canoe together, I would have rejoiced, believing that the stars were propitiously placed. It was a moment when the nervous challenger, praying his adversary would elect

"Pistols", half expects to hear "Swords", or possibly "Poison".

Et nodded an acknowledgment of Dum's existence and bestowed on him the doubtful honour of a deliberate stare of two seconds. Then she communicated in a circular telegraphic flash with the Skipper, who instantly marched for the back seat, interpreting to me in heliogram: "She doesn't like his looks". Et bolted up beside her in a thunderous silence which meant decidedly: "I don't like his looks".

In tones of caressing in which suddenly welled up the whole of my fifteen years' love for the man, I whispered some cheery words of invitation that meant: "She doesn't like your looks, old man". As the dear fellow's arm came creeping confidentially on my seat-back, he uttered a perfunctory remark about my gears which had clashed, then whispered in big-hearted humour to relieve my confusion: "She doesn't like my looks".

"Come along, Joe," brightened the Skipper, after a dozen funereal blocks, "this is Et's only chance to see Vancouver and you can tell her better than the rest of us."

Oddly as the sudden ability struck me, it seemed on the spur of the moment that being a jolly barker on a sight-seeing wagon was my natural vocation.

"We are now entering Stanley Park," I blew off my anger in tones of blithesome entertainment, "having so large an area that even our biggest liars

generally underguess it. It is an open secret and our civic pride that there are one thousand acres of primeval jungle. The closed secret and family skeleton now made public for the first and only time is that this vast heritage of nature is being unjungled as fast as local finances permit.

"The Park is a Naval Reserve owned by the Government of Canada, and is leased to the City for one dollar per year, the city having refused all offers to sub-let even at many hundred per cent on its investment."

"Yes," echoed Et, enthusiasm almost lukewarm for the moment, "a young Englishman I met at a dance told me that the only two Canadian facts he learned at school were Niagara Falls and Stanley Park."

Spring had come early and the beaches rang with the mirth of the bathers.

"Let me see!" Et was patronizingly taking in the scene as through an imaginary lorgnette. "What date is this?"

"The twenty-sixth of April."

"So it is. But in Winnipeg and everywhere, there was so much snow. Even at home they hadn't thought about summer."

"Exactly!" I saw my chance to interest her. "Neither do Boston people go on their summer holidays in April, but your aunt and I think it a good

time. In other people's holiday months, we want to be home."

Miss Dolbrook had the disarming mannerism of drawing out one's spirited boasting by an over-trained attention which, the instant it was paroled, became a smothered yawn, a yawn which the speaker perceived had been born with his first word.

Commanded, now, by a stern glance from the Skipper, I made a final sally as our party stood on Prospect Point, that famous pulpit of the forest, and looked down on the dots of passengers on the Noah's Ark decks of the steamer *Princess Patricia* entering the narrows.

"Look, Et! That boat just coming in is from Nanaimo, the place which is to be our port on Vancouver Island to-morrow. Isn't she beautiful and trim——" But the over-trained patience had blown up; Et was looking elsewhere.

An hour later, having threaded the light and shade whimsicalities of Marine Drive, we came to Point Grey wireless station. Here, at a window in the luxuriant hallway of green, the Drive swings to the very edge of a mighty cliff. Never a visitor of ours but had been smitten to instantaneous silence in the presence of what lay outside. In my desperate game, played for the admiration of our hard-to-please niece, it was the very last card.

Four hundred feet beneath us broke the folding waves of the Gulf of Georgia, a field of vanishing

corduroy in the western breeze. The mountain peaks of Vancouver Island shone in the late afternoon brilliance. To the south, limitlessness of bronzed water, while to northward a darkened narrow trough of sea with glistening white mountains on either side.

A vessel disappeared behind a headland. "The Seattle week-end boat for Alaska," explained Dum's commercial mind. Coasting steamers were converging towards the harbor entrance, a low, black domino of hull was a coal steamer for San Francisco and, as we waited, the vast white bulk of the *Empress of Australia*, inward bound from Yokohama and Hong Kong. It was living geography; the world moving at our feet.

Quietly I stepped out and stood behind Et who, in a finally-found eagerness, had slipped under the guard-rail and out near the dangerous cliff-edge. It was not so much misgiving that drew me as a sort of curiosity at the unlooked-for enthusiasm in her manner, if a rigid raptness can be called manner. Her small fists clenched and unclenched queerly, one black curl had become loose and was blowing wildly across her forehead in the wind which pressed the light suit close about her figure. Her sparkling eyes were opened widely and fixedly so that I experienced a sudden encouragement for the future.

"O, how beautiful!" she began to murmur absently. "What a world you are after all, you queer, uncultured West." Unfeeling of the ground, oblivious

of everything but her inspiration, Et half threw out her arms, took two steps forward and came so near to that appalling drop that I moved quickly up and touched her.

"Oh!" she cried, startled. "I wasn't—expecting anybody." Then, as though anxious to conceal her fright, she continued facing the broad panorama, but the hand I had laid under her arm was drawn impulsively close to her. It seemed wonderful in Et. I could feel the quickened pumping of her heart and all at once she was real, tender and human.

My intention had been at once to draw her back, but for some reason I stood there, enjoying the patting of her hand, looking out to sea with her and saying nothing. Then, all at once there was a softness, a yielding under one heel. Looking quickly, I perceived that a semi-circle of the ground at our feet was sinking. On those cliffs, the erosion of the waves is continually bringing down trickles of soil, which leaves an overhanging top held together by its sod. It required a second to awake to the danger, a second in which I saw a tiny root snap apart with unmistakable significance and throw up some dust particles as it broke. For nights afterwards, I saw that root snap.

Springing back, I tried to pull Et after me. Not understanding, she wanted to resist. A casual observer from the roadway might have supposed we were playing. It took almost no time in happening, but the caving-in moved too fast for me. There was the

sickening sensation of overbalancing. Then, all at once, came a mighty clutch at my shoulder and little Et, exclaiming, came tumbling down. But I kept my hold as I was myself dragged back. Then I turned and bestowed that odd look a drowning man bestows on his rescuer and beheld Dum, his shoes tearing grooves in the earth, his eyes alarmed and angry.

Collecting my breath for it, I shouted to the Skipper, who had wandered off a few yards, looking for dogwood blossoms. She came running and together we rallied our niece, who sat up after a few seconds, wiped a spot on her cheek which had been scraped on the clay, then clung to me with tearful words of gratitude. I had no voice to answer before the Skipper asked, "Where's Mr. Atwood?"

We all looked back towards the car. Dum was in his own front seat smoking a cigarette over the afternoon paper.

"What's happened over there?" he answered climbing out briskly.

## Chapter IV.

## QUITE AT SEA

MY ARRIVAL home Saturday at noon was an occasion for masterfulness. I had the narrow choice between being masterful or murderous.

The car had stood at the door all morning in order to be packed. On the rear rack was an overgrown receptacle that Et called her "case", but which the cartage bill had called a trunk. The one pair of running-board straps we owned held her suitcases. The elastic hat-holder the Skipper had asked me to fix to the ceiling held a paper bag covering two of Et's hats which she "simply couldn't go without". Et herself was summing up the hardships she was

expected to endure and the inconvenience of motor touring anyway. Our own combined equipment for the contemplated two months had been compressed for the time being into bundles and a single suitcase which, with the camera, the lunch box and a sheaf of coats, littered the rear seat space.

"Well," the Skipper sighed heavily, "I think everything's in. I hope you haven't had a trying morning, dear."

The morning a man leaves his business for two months is a maddening session and my hands were still twitching with the nightmare of it.

"Do you really suppose we'll ever get anywhere like this?" sighed Et, flopping back to an easy position. I began to feel as though my hands might be cured of their twitching if they could shake something. Et was within a foot or two and the Skipper, seeing my sidewise cross-eyed glare, led me away into the house. A minute or two later I discovered her on a balcony at the side, softly crying over our two little girls. As I picked up my babies one after the other and felt the small arms on my neck, my masterly control of the situation seemed to resurrect until we heard the wail:

"Why don't we go if we're going? This waiting for nothing drives me frantic."

My wife read my face in alarm. "Joe," she coaxed quickly, "you mustn't be angry with Et. I know she hasn't a thought in the world for anybody

but herself. Her mother was just like her at that age and I don't believe she bothers to make Et any different. We're going to have a perfectly awful time with her, but it can't be helped now."

She went back from the door to kiss the children once more, but the older one, laughingly impatient, pushed her away. "Well, why don't you go, mummy! If you always keep coming back you'll never get away to send us the little present."

"Huh!" the Skipper smiled grimly. "The sooner we get away, the sooner she'll get the 'little present,' " but the childish rapacity dispersed the clouds nevertheless.

On the wharf, Dum was waiting. At least he was there, so engrossed in rapping out decisions to this man and that who had followed him for last-minute interviews that he paid us no attention. Worse, he saw us arrive and went on with his conversation as though we had been so many boxes of freight. In his own office and out in "the yard" clerks whisper of Dum Atwood, "He's the big noise around here," but it's a wise woman who knows her own business man in action. At his lack of courtesy now, the Skipper looked loftily elsewhere, as though in the presence of an impudent traffic policeman, while Et's head wafted her half-closed eyes full a-starboard and she became engrossed in a wall of empty egg-crates.

There was a whistle from the hydraulic lift load-

ing automobiles and Dum abruptly left his group and stalked over to me with a card in his hand.

"Tie this to your steering wheel and get in behind that third car," he ordered and stepped away himself towards the passenger gangway reading a yellow paper as he went.

"Oh, don't mind us!" sniffed the Skipper, no longer choosing to ignore the brusqueness.

"Nice genteel friend to have," Et promptly punished us.

When I found Dum on the upper deck, he was still deep in his morning's mail. "Isn't it hell getting away?" he snarled.

"Yes," I agreed severely, "but when those women come up on deck, you forget it and be pleasant to them." My unsmiling face labelled the request a command.

We waited, but those women did not come up. We went down. On the dingy rope-smelling lower deck, I spied them and had the presence of mind to push Dum's head into the engine room while I went ahead to reconnoitre.

"Et's perfectly right, Joe," indignantly. "We won't go following Mr. Atwood about. If he can't even——"

"If that's what you call a bright Western business man, I'd rather talk to a Boston janitor," in angry support from the other quarter.

I employed suasion, moral and immoral, arguing

that we were all the same when worried, that the day had cleared and that it was beautiful up on deck. At the moment of cunning advantage I nodded Dum over and then ordered our rebels to alight.

"There's a full cargo of Americans on board, Miss Dolbrook," coaxed Dum, trying to be pleasant, as we emerged into the sunlight.

"What sort of Americans?" Et's chin tilted steeply to put the proper bias into her half-glance of scorn. She did it witheringly as though to add, "Your kind?" Smart conversation in her set consists in delivering the sting without the buzz.

There was a chorus of admiration as the boat glided the length of Stanley Park.

"It certainly is one lovely park, I'll say it is."

"Just look a' the autos hide-and-seekin' through the trees."

"Say! How about a stretch of sand like that for our kids, eh?" "You said it, Ab."

"Let's pack a few acres of that there grove back to St. Cloud."

Then, as we came under Prospect Point: "Some baby mountain! Get the black flies up there! No, right on top." "Bud Grant, you don't tell me that's people up there?"

As we steamed into open water, the gent's furnisher from St. Louis declared half sadly, "Well, over the river, Vancouver. You are certainly some mighty fine little town." The well-shaved, jolly-looking

speaker was standing beside us. As he turned to flick off his cigar, he mistook Et's stare for friendliness and asked, "Was you well acquainted in Vancouver, Miss?" But Et, in turn, suddenly mistook the haberdasher for a vacuum.

"How beastly vulgar!" in what might have been an undertone in a non-conductor atmosphere. "Shall we move?" and she plucked her aunt's sleeve. Either mood or design had lent her words an astonishing accent which apparently rang true enough for, while the furnisher became the storm centre of his affronted friends, we heard:

"You don't mean to tell me that she's the sort of English that owns this here country of Canada?"

This pointed remark, about as affectionately intended as a trench grenade, was pointed very straight in our direction and found its billet in the hearts of Dum and myself. For the next few minutes we seriously considered the wisdom of minding our own business, but in the end remained silent.

Through the windows, we saw that our missing members had fallen in with another pair, a Mrs. Fitzmaurice and her daughter. Et was suddenly and excitedly as pleased as punch at meeting people of her choice. To do her justice, she did not smirk nor toady; she was simply charmed and charming.

"Let's hurry in," I urged Dum. "If I'm not mistaken, milady is in for a bump."

Mrs. Fitzmaurice was a broad Englishwoman;

broad of figure in her old age, broad of accent because it was the speech of her forefathers, broad of heart and broad of ken. As the brave consort of a high public official she had run the gamut of British Columbia uncivilized. Mrs. Fitzmaurice's special mission in life was to save people from becoming humbugs.

"Oh, my dear!" She had just heard Et's grievances. "Don't—don't encourage us in that sort of thing. I was brought up in it, you have it in Boston, but out here the country needs all our energies. Really, it does."

"But, Mrs. Fitzmaurice! What is the advantage of good birth and cultural education?" Et was almost impatient in her surprise. "I had quite understood that you English people prided yourselves on your social insularity. Of course, we're all interested, and that sort of thing, in ordinary people—to look at and read about—but, asking them to your home for instance— It simply isn't harmonious. So long as there is a leisure class——"

"But there isn't, Miss Dolbrook, not in this part of the world." Mrs. Fitzmaurice was amused but at the same time apprehensive. "I must admit that you seem somehow to have found us out to an extent. We have Old Country people who do not possess the good sense or the common sense to become as democratic as the land they adopt. Love of country is really the same as love of children. We do not love

children until we have worked and suffered to make one our very own. Because some of my countryfolk —some of my own relations, I am sorry to say— refuse to adopt Canada and Canadians is merely because they have never helped or done anything for them. So far as I can gather, they love England only for what it has done for them—a cupboard love, really. I do not remember ever doing anything for England myself, but I have for British Columbia. I spent years in canoes and on horseback, camping on mountain sides and living in mining-camps, and I have no trouble in taking to my heart Canada and everything Canadian. As for Americans, they are my closest neighbours and best friends in the world."

"I envy you, Mrs. Fitzmaurice, but I just cannot see it that way. I haven't at all got over my horror at the crudity of things in the West. And the sort of people out there on deck! They do make me uncomfortable. No, I must say I still sympathize with the Old Country people out here who have known better things."

At this point Dum abruptly rose and left us. Before I could manage to follow him, I heard Mrs. Fitzmaurice ask the Skipper our plans and then warn her, "I hope, Mrs. Curlew, your niece will not get the wrong impression of our people on the Island. I know practically all of them, I suppose, and they are dears, really, but they do seem determined to have

themselves misunderstood by visitors just hotel-ing it through."

Dum exchanged a look of bored knowingness with me as we met on deck. Drawing up to the lighted match in my fingers, he asked, "What point are you making to-night?"

"Well, Duncan would be a nice easy run, but," I stopped to puff once or twice, and to throw the burnt end overboard, "ever been to that little hotel on Holland Bay?"

"Yes, I have. Dandy surroundings, all right, but English management, isn't it?"

"Can you go it for a night?" I smiled at him.

"You bet! It might do some good, you think?" Then, after a minute, "Say, Joe," he puffed in amused deliberation and pointed across towards the cliff at Point Grey. "That—that thing, last night. You know! Funny how things happen, isn't it?"

Reviewing the irritations of the day, and glancing through the saloon windows at the wholly unconvinced, smiling features of my niece, it did seem a bit funny how things happen.

## Chapter V.

## THE WEST REVOLTS

BY FIVE-THIRTY we were rolling over the pleasant Island roads, enjoying the picturesque bits of rock and beach-bound coast and the delectable isles of the Gulf. Even Et was feeding fat on the prospect.

"The people in charge of the hotel, Uncle Joe—are they the real English people—the charming sort?"

Presently we lapsed into that snuggest, dreamiest joy of a motoring party, a blissful forgetfulness of one another and a smiling wordless content of the world. I was idly guessing the mileage to Holland Bay, fixing our dinner hour and, in false fancy, nipping the band from my favourite make of cigar when——

Thump-thump—knock-knock-knock—fizz—bang-bang! and a dismal expiring of the engine. Distributor-trouble was a foreign sort of term, which, even had it occurred to me, would have conveyed little.

During the next three-quarters of an hour, a number of cars rolled up to us, their grinning drivers pausing to contribute any and all sorts of help and advice except that which would have been so effectively available through a proper use of one of the ever-present manicure files. Then, just as gloom of evening was prompting acceptance of an offer to send

back a towing car, the works amazingly resumed operations and away we started. But the trouble returned shortly, as it always will in such a case, and our motive power at its best did little better than buck and cough and bang us falteringly forward for another breath-catching hour.

Each time the engine fizzed itself to death, the stillness became tomblike by contrast. The road was suddenly weird as the primeval, empty as midnight. To hear our own breathing was agitating: it seemed to suggest exhaustion of our resources. Ordinary conversation echoed uncannily in the canyon of forest. Stars in the narrow path of chill sky overhead were strangely impersonal and far away. The monotonous croak of a frog lent a sort of mocking loneliness to the situation and none of us found any humor in Dum's reference to "The Canadian Nightingale".

I recalled a couple of diverging roads and shrewdly feared we should have taken one of them. Certainly I did not know where we were. We might have hobbled along to somewhere eventually but, while giving my whole attention to keeping the engine alive, I missed an elbow of the road in the moonless gloom and the car slid heavily and deeply into the soft roadside. We were marooned and helpless.

For Et's sake, the Skipper tried to seem undismayed. In gratitude, that young lady—proving, at least, her freedom from fear—reminded us that she

suspected from the beginning that the thing was absurd and had told us so. What did I suppose would happen next, and how much of this sort of thing did we usually have in the West? The suspiciously cheerful member I found out in front, pretending to be searching for a way out of our trouble.

"Begins to look like a night out, Joe."

Dum has the peculiar habit of laughing in a confidential whisper. "Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!" under his breath usually means that the rest of us will see the point presently.

His face was invisible, but the tone was that of enjoyment. Usually such a resourceful man, his reticence on the subject of the distributor trouble now struck me as being very odd.

As we looked about, the outlines on the narrow horizon were still vague and unfamiliar. We two walked ahead and presently came on open country and a lighted window. It was some time before we could make ourselves heard, but the farmer and his wife proved charming people, sympathetic and hospitable. The house was large and they would accommodate us for the night.

"We're awfully lucky to find this place," I said, when we were on the way back to our stranded car.

"Awfully lucky?" Dum questioned out of the odd silence he had maintained. "I suppose so. Why, yes. It'll be a good place, all right."

"You old rascal!" I accused him, "I believe you're

thoroughly disappointed that we found it. My wife wouldn't relish sitting up all night, I can tell you."

"Yes," he smiled grimly, if sheepishly, "I suppose I should have thought of her."

"But what's the idea, anyway?" I asked.

"Oh, we're just woolly westerners, you know. What's the use of a name without the game?"

As we got within earshot, the Skipper called, "Don't you expect to find us devoured by this time?"

"Was Et nervous?" I whispered slyly.

"No! When Et is mad right through, she doesn't seem to think about nerves."

A surprisingly good supper mended our humour. Immediately afterwards, Et remembered a scarf she had left in the car, demanded the key from me and trotted off into the darkness. Sternly, I ordered Dum to follow her. A moment later, the Skipper as sternly ordered me to follow both. Dallying near the gate, voices came presently adown the dark road. At first mere sounds, then a busy coaxing of girlish chatter and a deep "Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!" to preface the reply.

"Not at all, Miss Dolbrook, a perfectly natural question! When I was just a little shaver, my older brother and I were both very fat and very quarrelsome, so a neighbour one day called us Tweedledee and Tweedledum. Even my own parents were calling me Dum within a week, and it's a hard name to shake."

"How perfectly funny! You don't look a bit like Tweedledum now," in a feminine titter, while their pace lagged. "And about me. You know, when parents are silly enough to name a child Ethelfrinda, people have just got to abbreviate it. And that's why I'm Et."

"O-ho!" I chuckled myself a warning at the time, "Confidences, eh!"

## Chapter VI.

## A SNIFF OF FUTURE TROUBLE

THE perspicacity of our quaint-voiced hostess was not a little amusing to me. Without seeming to raise her glance from the breakfast cups, she had smiled a subtle knowledge of the duel of minds into which Dum and Et had relapsed. Whatever armistice governed the moments they were to be alone, the girl's fixed intention was hostility for her surroundings, particularly where the young man was concerned. In retaliation, he took delight in appearing to her as a crude person who spoke the smart word at the most irritating moment.

"Good-by, Miss Dolbrook," smiled this kind friend coaxingly, "you're going to love our Island as everybody does." And when Dum passed her, just in advance of me, she touched his sleeve and drew him down to whispering space. "Better not be too severe on her, my young bashaw. You are going to be a long time together and you might be sorry if you should perchance happen to——" The rest went straight into Dum's ear.

Perhaps it was the strange bed which had set Ethelfrinda off into a dejected humour this morning. For half an hour the rest of us were wrapped in her silent reproach. Then there bobbed up the day's

surprise in the very tangible and stubborn form of a huge Douglas fir fallen across the road.

"Well," demanded our martyr in a tone to imply that we might have planned the thing maliciously, "is there no other road we can go 'round by?"

"Not another road in the world!" My jaw set so disgustedly and the others remained so significantly, long-sufferingly silent, that even the martyr felt an explanation stirring within her.

"Most people have their eccentricities," she volunteered archly. "Mine is that I am often irritable and disagreeable the first few hours I am awake."

Et's father comes from a line of outstanding types of American citizenship, giving nobly of his attainments in medical science and devoting his life to his fellowmen. Apparently he is so busy attaining and devoting that he has never been able to father his only child. I realized it was time to take Et aside. As a matter of fact, she had been left alone in the car so I went to her.

"Don't ever say that again and expect people to believe it's even an excuse," I began, and her very shoulders jolted in resentment. It seemed improbable that anybody had ever reproved this young woman before. I decided to make a job of it. "This 'eccentricity' is merely the practice of disagreeable and selfish people." Pause. "And surely my niece is not that?"

For answer she lifted a saucy chin, looked at me

from aloft and silently meandered her head away, which satisfied me well enough.

A long line of cars, growing by a sort of capillary attraction of the road, resolved itself into a misery-loves-company picnic in which the misery was very speedily extinguished by the love. Even our niece at last forsook her unsociable novel to listen and look smilingly on.

"Now, Et," sharply as I touched the starter when the road was clear again, "it's too late to make Victoria to-day. We have time to get as far as Nanaimo, or we could get to Port Alberni on the west coast of the Island."

"Well," she hesitated shyly just a moment, then brightened almost amiably, "I think I'd like the Alberni place." In an aside to me she had the good grace to say, "You see, I can be ever so agreeable a person—after the first few hours of the day."

From the Cameron Lake road, which dynamite has gnawed into the surrounding cliffs, the car plunged into a grove of lordly timber, then up a never-ending hill, winding across the backbone of mountains, and a glorious slide down to tide water at the head of the beautiful "Canal".

As we sat on the upper veranda of the hotel after dinner, I looked once or twice at Et and hoped she was enjoying herself where she sat, meditative and alone. I told Dum to join her and to tell her something about the country. He pointed out the govern-

ment light-ship at the wharf and talked of the twenty- and sixty-pound salmon waiting to be caught by the most inexperienced fisherman.

"All that space across there," an instant she pointed a finger at the darkening sweep between two mountain slopes, "are there no towns or farms or golf links or——"

"Where we are sitting is practically an outpost of civilization." Dum sounded disappointed but patient. "Beyond this blur of electric lights there is little else, just nature and opportunity."

Dum should be an adept at convincing a girl on a serious subject, but I somehow experienced the misgiving that he was not making headway. Et, easily distracted by the laughter of some young couples below, leaned forward suddenly into the range of the street lamps, gazed a while and then slowly dropped back, gathering the fur of her coat closer as she sighed with a look of far-away intentness, while Dum talked on.

I felt glad that he wanted to be near her. His sorry flight from the hard-working routine of business and his ill-starred holiday in a treacherous Garden of Eden had left him grimly, pitiably alone so far as women were concerned. So I smoked blissfully,

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anon watching Et where she sat, wittingly or otherwise a balm to Dum's murderous estimate of false womankind. Her thoughts seemed very serious.

When my wife had seen her niece comfortably stowed away in her room, she joined me and reported the girl as saying:

"I'm homesick and miserable, dear. It was seeing those young couples that did it. I've been glad in a way to be rid of that Outlands Golf Club life for a change, but all at once I felt a yearning for it. 'Round home everything's so safe and familiar and settled. There's no darkness, really, and I never knew what silence meant—not this shivery darkness and the silence that you can weigh by the pound. Last night I felt ever so brave—perhaps it was because I was so horribly annoyed—but, Oh, this West! There's so terribly much of it. The civilization is oceans better than I ever imagined, but it's all so close to the wilderness. The empty solitude of it appalls me. It does make a new courage somewhere inside of me; I've felt that once or twice, too, but, so far, it only makes me seem tinier than ever. Tonight I was looking into that wide, endless black valley of mountains and wondering how a great big country could be right there in front of me without

one single human twinkle of light anywhere. All at once I wanted somebody to protect me. There were always so many nice boys at Outlands. There was Clarry Wentworth; he's so tall and confident, and he dances divinely—I must tell you all about him some day—and Clarry's going to be one of our big lawyers, too. I guess I never appreciated him properly. If I hadn't treated Clarry the way I did——"

## Chapter VII.

## DISCOVERING MAYFAIR AMONGST THE MAN-EATERS

THERE have been at least forty occasions in my life when "I never saw it rain so hard!", but that morning at Port Alberni is the latest. The roof rattled with it, the branches were borne down under the weight of it, and the glistening street danced under a little mist from the bouncing drops.

There was the great summit hill to go back over and we had no chains. "We can never start out again till that road dries," the Skipper spoke the feelings of all.

"We mustn't commence losing days for such things as the weather!" I crushed the budding revolt.

"Then you think we've got to make it, uncle?" earnestly from Et. "I'm ready! You can get some rope for the wheel, I suppose?"

However trying Et might be under ordinary difficulties, she somehow gave the impression that she would be a volunteer in a crisis.

Against heavy grades and opposing streams we made the summit and viewed a wide wet world, then coasted down to the lake shore where we discovered a family wetter far than any of those who missed the ark on its maiden voyage.

"Dad left on business yesterday afternoon," laughed a twelve-year-old son from under a drenched cap, "and we had a fine time here in the tent till it began to blow and pour last night. The darn tent came down on top of us all. Alex and I got out to fasten her up, but, Gee! we couldn't do a thing in that wind."

The boys had got the tent partly righted, but it leaked miserably from its double soaking. There was only room for the mother and the supplies under it and even then one side was open to the weather. They had a little gasoline stove going and were using the warmth to dry some undershirts after having made a pot of tea over it.

"Won't your father laugh when he hears about it," and the mother actually laughed in anticipation.

"But how in the world are you feeling by this time," the Skipper puckered her brows smilingly. "And what have you boys been doing since early morning?"

"Us? We went huntin' squirrels. Didn't get any, though."

"It was nasty at first," put in the mother, "but we'd had most of our sleep. We're all warm again now and the sun's coming out any minute."

In justification of her optimism, the warm vapoury light of it soon enveloped us. "What a woman!" enthused the Skipper. "What an example to those

boys in life. She's a good typical British Columbian, Et."

We ran a hundred and thirty miles that day over pavement and roads of gravel made smooth and dustless by the rain. We were in a part of the country settled by crowded Englanders, lured abroad by pictures of "A little bit of England transported"; the England in which it is not *infra dig* for a gentleman's hands to hew the wood for his own establishment, the England where he may pursue his pioneering instinct in an atmosphere of home. There are cool, seductive houses, at first glance modern, but with a half-timbered Tudor gable peeping out from its ivy cloak onto Elizabethan flower-beds in the shade of gnarled oaks, where hedge, holly and rhododendron surround a weather-beaten sun-dial and a massive garden seat.

My niece had not been free of her morning humour but, as the day warmed and brightened, she warmed and brightened with it. The barbaric West of her smoked telescope vision resolved itself into a shining Eden.

"I have it, auntie!" she beamed conciliatingly all at once. "It's a stage, set for old-fashioned plays but the setting and scenery are real and the actors just living their customary lives."

"And allow us a footlights acquaintance with them," added Dum, as though ready in advance to refuse the olive branch.

"Naturally!" Et sniffed unpleasantness. "People of taste do not encourage a greenroom acquaintance—unless one happens to be the right sort."

"I guess you're right. Let's try this fellow and see if he does."

Walking towards us in the side path came a tall, dignified man. "O, yes, he's English," Dum stage-whispered somewhat offensively to me. "They all wear brown coat and gray pants or gray coat and brown pants."

As the man passed, he kept his gaze most properly straight ahead of him. Nor did he answer at once when I slowed down and addressed him, though when we were twenty yards away he turned and called shyly:

"Hi, there, sir! We-ah y'speaking to me? So sorry!"

He replied to our enquiries in the kindest tones, but blushed the while in puzzled amused politeness, as I could fancy doing myself were I drawn suddenly and accidentally into personal discussion with a man from Mars.

"Yes, we fa-wm—after a fashion. Precious little in it without lots of hard work, though," as he quickly became friendly. "Most of the bottom lands just hereabouts are owned by the Indians; if you're just a poor blighter of an Englishman you've got to go 'way up on a hill and irrigate."

"Well, the country belonged to them, didn't it?"

I could have pardoned a sharp resentment of Dum's remark, but our informant only blushed again and, with the best of good humour, explained, "Quite right, quite right! But the worst of it is they don't seem to make anything of the land. The only time the lazy beggars work is in the summer, when they all clear out and go away to pick berries."

Very shortly his embarrassment was all gone and he was urging us to come up to his place for a cup of tea. "Come along, now, do! My wife's most awfully keen on people. Really, she is." And when we pled excuse, "But you will honor us then on the way back? We'd be most happy, I assure you. Jolly fine to have had this bit of rubbing elbows."

As we drove along, Dum undertoned philosophically, "That's quite convincing, Joe. I've always thought it was mostly shyness. That chap, for instance—he's a splendid chap, you can depend on it."

From the ladies' discussion of the incident arose the suggestively distinct remark, "It's so refreshing, auntie, to find that there are polite and charming young men in this end of the world."

Dum's sharp, amused glance of enquiry won only my involuntary smile, for I could no longer quite approve the grotesque part he was playing. The girl's barbed arrow glanced harmlessly from his armour of unconcern. That the wound she sought to inflict rebounded chiefly on herself is merely one of the many penalties imposed by nature for the crime

of being feminine. The hurt of it was still with her when we climbed into an eagle's nest sort of place looking down into a gully of Brobdingnagian depth, two far-stretched furry mountains slanting at perilous angle to a salt water floor, calm as mercury, narrow, tapering and black as tar.

"Et, *this* is the Malahat we've talked so much about!" The Skipper's expectant coaxing aroused only a frightened smile and I was not surprised to have my wife whisper, "The poor child's simply terrified to open her mouth."

For another hour we glided over a road sliced out of one of those furry mountains, a broad and graceful road made thrilling by the sight of great heights and depths. Just before dusk we slipped into Victoria. Twilight softened the quaint gardened beauty of its high-fenced homes into a series of pictures soothing to the nerves and stimulating to the imagination. Across the sapphire streak of Juan de Fuca Strait, the white Olympics caught the lowering sun and were lifted into a row of phosphorescent moonstones.

"I've heard," brightened Et again, "that Victoria is delightful in its resistance to the on-rush of the modern stampede; that she stands dignifiedly aloof from vulgar haste and change."

"Yes, I guess that's right," but I knew from Dum's tone that amusement was behind it. "When a modern London business man arrives in Victoria, he rubs his eyes and then decides that he must be im-

personating his own grandfather. 'This place isn't English,' he writes home. 'It's—well, it's Victorian, early Victorian.' However, for a lover of stage-settings it's a fine place."

Et promptly drew back into her shell and I was again sorry for the peculiar turn of Dum's vagary.

Passing through the brief shopping section, the car rolled into the show-window of British Columbia's capital. The cupola and side towers of the House of Parliament rose from out their bed of spring's first verdure like a conventional picture of a Moorish castle. The rainbow-surfaced waters of the inner harbour sheltered a fleet of pleasure boats, backed by the stately white greyhounds of the Coast service, while behind, in the outer basin, rose the wispily-smoking funnels of the deep sea vessels.

It would be hard for man or woman to breathe a first hour of Victoria without voicing gladness. Et was finding the repression a hard one just now, while the rest of us watched her and bided our time. Well did we know that, for this luxury-loving girl, a stimulating surprise was just around the corner—nay, just across the road. A few yards back from the roadway, rising from a carpet of faultless lawn and clothed in ivy, was a glorified French chalet, its hundreds of electric lighted windows presenting in the clear but fading twilight the illusion of countless gems on a velvet ground.

"What—in the world—is that?" Et lightened up again.

"That," chirped the Skipper, "is where you are going to live for a day or two."

Et eyed us all coyly, then she smiled, that same self-indulgent smile, but with something added which seemed to apologize, "I can't help myself now." As we entered she was bubbling all at once. Two vainly-expostulating men were ordered into evening clothes and told to report for dinner in half an hour.

Soon an exultant cry from the adjoining room told that the girl had spied the scene out across the Strait. "How divinely perfect!" I heard, then, as my watch showed a few minutes to the appointed hour, "Oh, to keep it just like that, now! I could sit here drinking it in all night."

At length, and just as she had hastily announced herself ready, there floated to our ears through the vine-grown windows the sweet sense—sensation rather than sound—of indefinite music, so there followed more visiting at the window and more exclamations at some gently swaying Chinese lanterns on a passing launch and a far-off lighthouse that blinked on the headland. Dum was tapping my door and leering questioningly but wordlessly as he jerked his thumb ladiesward, but nobody ventured this time to trespass on the golden humour of our companion.

As we all stepped from the elevator into refining brightness, electric with human ripple, we felt the

rhythm of the hotel orchestra now close beside us, and for one untroubled minute Et sat on the pinnacle of her shallow world of pleasure.

"Oh, what a nice surprise to bring me to," she sighed again.

Then began the procession past the lounge parties to the dining-room at the other end of the building. It was too early in the season for the hordes of foreign tourists, so the strolling Victorian, his sisters, his cousins and his aunts, had taken full possession to discuss their ambling affairs, puff languid curls of smoke, and unhurriedly to survey the passing stranger. People had settled to the mid-evening familiarity with their surroundings, the music had just crooned away into a dreamy intermission, nobody thought of moving. It was the psychological moment for an effective surprise, and Et was devoid of the conceit to realize what a strikingly fashionable figure she presented. A bare third of the way she plucked the Skipper aside into the half shaded refuge of the fountained tea-garden.

"What *is* the matter, auntie?" she trembled in alarm. "My hair, it hasn't come down, has it? Is my pet'coat showing?" She was abashed and mortified.

"I don't know, dear. Come with me a minute. Here, under this light—— Hold your head up!" Then, in a tone of calm understanding, "Yes, I see what it is. I was afraid, child, that you were paying

too much attention to mooning and too little to your mirror."

The neck of my niece's outdoor dress consisted of peculiar coarse lace strips or crocheted work. For most of the three days she had happened to sit on the sunny side of the car, her face protected by the top, but shoulders exposed so that she had been rather badly sunburned. Now, in low neck gown, the skin shielded by the heavy lace stood out white against a red background. We could not but admit that the effect was somewhat that of tattooing.

The dining-room was brilliantly lighted but, in our mood, somehow a sombre place under its massive mahogany beams. At the late hour we had bountiful attention. But it was of no use, Et's temper was beyond redemption for the day.

"Why should they have stared at me?" she almost wept. "I didn't come here to be a curiosity."

"Listen, now! Listen to me," the Skipper comforted. "Nobody did stare, really. They were attracted to you because you were pretty and happy and wore a beautiful gown. Then, one by one, they caught sight of those peculiar markings—it is funny, you know, until you powder it—and of course each person tried to puzzle it out. The best bred people in the world would be surprised into a second look. Certainly I should."

"Sure!" scoffed Dum unrelentingly. "Who wouldn't laugh to see a picket fence around a girl's neck."

## Chapter VIII.

## HYPHENED AND NON-HYPHENED

OUR one complete day in Victoria was bobbed at both ends by more "eccentricities".

Reading and re-reading the morning paper allowed for the appearance of the Skipper but failed to exhaust the nameless humour of our missing member. When we had strolled into the gardens, I noticed the Skipper fussed all the time for fear Et might meantime have come down. As is usual in our domestic board of management, my wife had full charge of the department of worry.

Returning indoors we discovered the young lady, not only very much up, but up in the air. What, she wondered, was the good of telling her to get up early and then leaving her to cool her heels like this? Such affectionate sentiment and the offended observation, "I suppose, anyway, we've seen what there is to see here," were, of course, the scapegoat for the real grievance in her morning mind. She was still smarting under the attention she had attracted and she was exasperated with Dum for his lack of sympathy. During breakfast he studiously invited her further unfavourable notice by his breezy manner of greeting acquaintances who had come in by the morning boat. A pompous party of chisel-faced women and walrus-

whiskered men lowered their papers and forgot their coffee to look scrutinizingly at us.

We succeeded at least in destroying Et's supposition that she had seen it all, because the coast line of Victoria and its Oak Bay district were indeed gladdening sights on this sunniest of spring mornings. Running along a sea-wall against which the waves surged like soda-charged milk, our car was hailed by four men in the uniform of a United States warship then visiting the city. A tramway terminus a few hundred yards away probably accounted for their presence.

"'Xcuse me, shir," shakily from the spokesman, "but p-p-possibly you could help a foreigner in your mid-shdt out of a little trouble. We're all sailormen of the American Navy. Yea, here we are, too. We left our ship yes'day afternoon with the dish-tinct understanding that it would wait for us till thish morning. Now, here we are. I was p'ticular to tell 'e conductor to put us off when we got to the sea. And here we are. Very obliging fellow, the conductor, I musht admit, 'cause here we are. Now, do you happen to know where (*hic*) our ship? We know it's somewhere in the water. Here we are all ready to go 'board. Thish the sea alright, but no ship."

Following the best business procedure, Dum referred our friends back to the conductor with a recommendation to the sailormen to go on being referred back till they reached the beginning. But when, in blind-leading-the-blind formation, they had

shuffled half way back to the car line, there arose an argument amongst them. Presently the three forcibly laid hold of the herald, turned him about and started him off with a shove in our direction.

"Ye'll have to 'cuse me again, shir," he announced apologetically, "but my mates won't let y'occasion pass without congratulating two fine gentlemen and two of the bu-beaudif-buuf-ilest ladies of Victoria on the charms of your city. You have a lovely country and you're not afraid to let a fellow have what he needs to enjoy it. When my mates and I get back to New York we goin' dig up the Statue of Liberty and bring the old girl out here and set her up in Victoria."

This incident and a delectable outdoor luncheon lent us their jollity, a jollity raised to enchantment by a visit to the noted Butchart sunken gardens. The charm and eventfulness was ensnaring Et into rhapsodies, if at times she still trod circumspectly to avoid a further encounter with Dum.

It was mid-afternoon and my hopes were high that evening and peace would arrive together. This optimism was, however, but the treacherous refuge natural in one so woeful a tenderfoot at handling a pair of unbroken colts. Straight in front, almost in sight, Beelzebub and his wife were stacking the cards against me.

Doubtless every city—be it Rouen, Auckland or Cheyenne—has its typical tight little group whose cloistered life is devoted to a discussion of the neigh-

bours on the basis of their ancestors as opposed to everything else. We tumbled on the Victoria lodge of this world-wide sisterhood on the veranda of a delightfully appointed inn.

As good or bad luck would have it, the typical group was more typical than usual. Tea, that immovable feast the English have carried triumphantly to the doors of a barbaric world, was the order of the hour. The ladies, as is quite usual, were fat, the men, as is less usual, were absent, the babble, as is unfailingly usual, was on a staple subject and far removed from anything so homely as the crop prospect or the history of Canada.

While Et and her aunt were examining the rugs and moose-heads within, Dum and I stepped outside, unsuspicious of the scout instinct whereby dowager veranda parties can scent, identify, claw to pieces and dispose of a newly-arrived party before such party can hang up its hat.

"Who? Who did you say they were?" squeaked a spectral whisper to the other fat ones. "Distantly related to the Pennistons, was she? Yes, I remembah now. A family of Pennistons came into the Okanagan about the time Lord Aberdeen established the Coldstream Rawnch. Not an old family at all but passably nice people, I've heard. Whom did she marry? Anybody worth while, or just one of those business unknowns?" One on each side, the others now tried to suppress the spectral whisper which

came in puffy whistles from a small key-hole of a mouth surmounted on a few chins. "Standing just behind me, eh!" in a whistle intended to be pitched an octave lower, but which was all one to the horn ear-trumpet curling into its owner's ear and tracing its source deftly through the marcel wave to the wide spout, which arrangement was no doubt a wonderful optical illusion in the days when girls wore hairpins the size of sunflowers. "Then perhaps he'll *tell* us who he is. Tee-hee-hee-hee!"

Before this witticism could be properly appreciated, Et and the Skipper appeared and the original intelligencer of the party undertoned, "I'll speak to her and we'll find out."

"Why, how do you do, Beth. I don't believe I've seen you since you used to come up from the school with Gwendoline. We heard of your marriage. Let me see, you're Mrs.—Yes, Curlew. Is your husband with you?"

Another minute and we had all been handed over the stile into the Elysian fields of tin-horn noblesse. A battery of three experts was detailed to cross-examine the Skipper as to whether my name had added lustre to hers or had created her a person one could scarcely afford to know.

A much bebangled maiden lady named Eleanora sitting next to me smiled slyly. "I believe you could tell us, Mr. Curlew. Are the Bulkeleys of New

Worcester related in any way to the Sir Jasper Bulkeleys of Sheepsend Moor in Devonshire?"

I did happen to know that old Jim Bulkeley of New Worcester had been a Berkley until his father went to the penitentiary for forgery but, in the interests of brevity, I denied it.

"Nearly all the heads of our families do trace back, you know, to their famous aristocratic forebears in England."

"No doubt," I agreed, "though most heads of families that I know are fairly busy trying to do something that their children will want to trace back to."

"In our own case," Eleanora went on, completely missing me, "my father was one of the Dunserrans who are such large landowners in the East counties. The name is a corruption of Don Serrano, a noble Spanish general who came to England as a refugee with nothing but the old family jewels on which to found his fortunes. You might notice the swarthiness in my own complexion."

The swarthiness, in combination with a peculiarity in her voice when pronouncing "Dunserran" I had already noticed and was in some amusing, elusive way puzzled by it.

"Have you any relations in Vancouver?" I asked brightly and perhaps sharply, for I had a curious thought.

"My brother Arthur is or was there," she ad-

mitted, as though it was a matter of no moment. "I myself lived in Vancouver for a time, but there were always so many sorts of people one didn't know. For a good many years now I've lived on the Island. One feels so much more at home amongst the older families, don't you think so?"

The voice and the features were unmistakable now. Good old Art Duncanson—best old scout of his day—bached it in the same shack where I met Dum. A very successful and real fellow he was, too. While I smiled sweetly at Eleanora, I recalled how Art used to laugh, telling about his father, who came out to Rossland in its early days, expecting, in this wild Canadian west, to earn his living holding up stage-coaches or stabbing opponents at the card-table, but everything turned out to be so orderly and businesslike that he had to take to his old trade of butchering. He married the halfbreed cook at the War Eagle camp and her relatives told him of a good claim which he staked and sold for quite a large amount. "When the old man died," Art told us, "I didn't need money, so I let sister Nellie have it all, to invest in a family tree over on the Island." In fancy I could still see him chortling over it.

Meantime Mrs. Scott-Alden was besieging Dum with, "Do you know the Alden-Prices in Vancouver?" "The Colonel Meekers?" "The Hope-Johnsons?"

Vancouver is still small enough for a man in Dum's position to know something about almost

everybody, but he kept a tight rein on both his information and his patience until his examiner, in a sort of last-chance commiseration, added, "Nor the Major Salmon family? Dear old Major! He's one of the jolliest sort."

"Indeed! You relieve me. Salmon's next door neighbour tells me that he's known the man for over ten years without even a nodding friendship," Dum broke forth, grinning artfully.

Dum is the type of man at whom a woman turns to look—especially if he has first looked at her. And in that case it is not the attractive combination of delicate tan on a remarkably fresh complexion which holds her so much as the engaging faculty of his gray eyes in rendering the person looked at very comfortable or very uncomfortable. This concentrated glance, once enjoyed or endured, will seldom be forgotten. Mrs. Scott-Alden abruptly ebbed. For a minute the others were not fully aware that his remark was other than a response to family tree culture, so the lady of quivering chins turned and promptly whistled half a dozen bars of hyphens and titles, with apparently no idea whatever of getting replies, but proclaiming her sudden fear that Dum was a person to be impressed.

"I don't know any of the 'Peerage' idol-worshippers of Vancouver," impatiently. This time the mirthless grin won silence. "In my business," he paused to make the word sound as offensive as

possible, "trade conditions make it so I can't afford to know these people." That finished it. The 'can't afford to know' had got the discussion horribly on the wrong foot. Even the unhearing lady ebbed.

Dum and I suddenly remembered we had not seen the collection of Indian baskets, and started smartly away.

"Are you interested, then, in the work of our Indians?" came in a final whistle through the key-hole, the speaker having at the moment caught up with only half the conversation.

"Why, yes," I answered sweetly, "an old friend of mine, Art Duncanson, used to say," here I allowed myself a fleeting glance at Eleanora, "that the Indians were the real squirearchy of Canada."

On our drive back to the hotel Dum and I confined our sociability to an exchange of *bon mots*, while the occupants of the back seat dealt us words that were far-fetched nothings but looks that were sharp two-edged swords. By voice and glance, by her very silence, Et was nursing her hostility against Dum. And it was a mistake, just then, that he announced his discovery of a grill-room underneath the main dining-room of the hotel where prices were about half. Ethelfrinda Dolbrook was the purest type of financial aristocrat: she was so sure of her finances that she never thought about them. She was not a money snob for the simple reason that it had never occurred to her that money had a labour

value or a limit. For certain things one paid in thanks, while some well known classes of people preferred money, that was all. She showed a noticeable willingness to accept humble conditions when necessary, but that anybody should propose to buy something for a dollar when a better one was available for two was a shocking revelation of vulgarity.

While we were dining that evening, and almost as though he had studied the most rakish angle for it, Dum put the hat on the climax. Instead of the purring, "Wait-ah!" with the practised rising inflexion, he insisted on calling him "George", in a loud voice and, after again attracting attention to our table, proceeded to carry on a conversation with George.

In the lounge, the chesterfields are arranged in back-to-back groups. I seated the ladies and recommended that they decide how we should spend the evening while Dum and I went for a stroll. Almost as we started, however, I remembered an advertised dramatic event for which it might be necessary to get tickets at once, so we turned back. The two stout old men who had installed themselves in the seat behind the Skipper and Et seemed to recognize us, for they rose and, with a friendly nod, walked away.

"I simply will not, auntie," Et was undertoning, and a most eerie sensation of eavesdropping possessed me. "He's the most offensive person I ever met. In spite of his cleverness—and, of course, he is clever

in his brutal way—he didn't have sense enough to stay at home when he found I was coming."

"I don't think I'd say that, Et," the Skipper offered. "Mr. Atwood had arranged to come with us first of all, really." There was no response to this, so she went on, "If you knew what he'd had to go through lately——"

"I know what he's making me go through every day," savagely.

"Ah! Et, don't be so sorry for yourself. If you or I had suffered what I know Dum must have suffered, no amount of sympathy could make us bright and agreeable."

"Anything in particular?" There was just a momentary glimmer of curiosity in Et's scornful turn of the head, but her pride forbade her making more of it.

"I hardly think you would properly understand if I told you." Plainly, the Skipper was willing to tell the story, and I held my breath in wonderment as to the possible effect. Passers-by would not have taken us for one party. Dum and I smoked silently and looked unconcernedly around the lighted room, at the orchestra, the ceiling, the people, anywhere but at one another or behind us. It was too late to interrupt, too risky to move away.

"His affairs don't really interest me," said Et, shrugging her shoulders, while her attention shifted easily to a group of men in uniform who were coming in.

"But hadn't you better make up your mind just to go to this play? That surely can't——"

"I shan't give him one other chance to humiliate me. When engaging people are about, his presence is just like—well, like a family skeleton Jack-in-the-boxing."

Under cover of the uniformed men passing, Dum and I wordlessly agreed to go for our stroll, during which we discussed railway freight rates.

## Chapter IX.

## PRIDE GOETH BEFORE——?

COMING down early for my morning paper, I spied Dum in a far corner reading his. Now that he had had the night to think it over, what would he do? I thought of trying to postpone the issue but, lest the temptation overcome me, rushed over to him, tapping his shoulder as I sat down and noisily turned to a page I never read, but without offering to meet his eyes.

"Things in Europe still blowing about," I yawned when I had got settled.

"Yeh! Huh-huh!" His interest was limited to turning a page noisily.

"The Hudson's Bay Company's decided to build."

"Yeh! Huh-huh!"

"I see they're completing the Pacific Highway paving, all right."

"Yeh! Huh-huh!"

"Did you notice that the Siskiyou Pass has been closed only ten days all winter?"

There was a silence this time that made me nervous. My starboard ear reported that Dum had laid down his paper.

"Say, Joe!"

I looked at him then, because there was no use trying to avoid it any longer. It was his move and,

as I wanted to move with him, I smiled broadly on seeing him smiling broadly.

"I'm not quitting."

"Good for you!"

From long friendship for Dum, I now felt all at once that I wanted to follow him, wanted to die for him or something like that. His rather serious face was seldom gay, but it was gay now, and we admire the man who smiles at difficulties and strides unconcernedly over rebuffs. I fancy, as a boy, Dum was always the one to whom his team-mates looked for courage when the enemy was forcing a retreat. There was doubtless a limit to his moral courage, but he never let it be seen, and with most of us he had gained the reputation and air of secret mental resources, very much as a person known to have a private income engages our financial hero-worship until we know just what the income really is. Even on the occasions when Dum took second position in a tussle of wits, he still somehow left the impression that he had not extended himself and could in fact re-open the battle any moment and rout his opponents. It was only this morning that I discovered Dum's fighting face was not necessarily a frowning face. His reserve strength showed now behind his remarkably clear eyes in a smile.

As he handed Et into the back seat I could not help thinking his manner a supreme achievement. While the girl's face betrayed a shyness—a guilty

shyness, I thought—Dum's expression was ease and self-reliance personified. Looking closely at them, I realized that he had Et just where he had others who chose to be his enemies: he knew her plans without her knowing his. It was this, no doubt, which accounted for his having appeared to such unusual advantage during breakfast. We had all noticed it. His style was just as usual, yet different. His movements were perhaps a trifle more deliberate, his glances a perceptible moment longer. When he spoke—and it was he who spoke most of the time—Et kept looking at him closely in an odd fascinated way. All at once she found that she did not understand him at all and I almost confessed to sharing her wonder. I had the feeling that the smoke of his cigarette was an ambush from behind which he could see our every thought.

Dum Atwood was a man who had lived with all sorts of people; railroad construction camps, Bolshevistic lumber camps. I had an idea also that he had lived at good boarding-schools and business clubs, but this side of Dum was not his "interesting" side, and it was his "experience" with which his friends associated him. He wanted to talk science and literature to an unschooled fisherman and red rebellion to a clergyman. Perhaps he fancied he got more out of people that way. Being all things to all men or even agreeable to all men was merely a lazy way of passing time.

We had an eighteen-mile drive to the international ferry at Sidney and I fell to wondering who Dum Atwood really was. Men enquire so little about one another. All our years' friendship had not told me, for instance, the name, occupation or address of his father, or whether Dum really recognized social distinctions.

On the surface, he showed no new deference to Et's views or humours. Some distance out, a little dog sat in the middle of the road calmly watching our car approach; nor did the pup stir until I had pulled up to avoid running him down. Then, very slowly, he moved to one side, to sit and stare again.

"I guess his mother sent him out to watch for the tattooed lady," laughed Dum.

In few, if any, of the seven seas is there so delightful an archipelago of travel as that afforded by stepping aside from the whirring traffic of the highway and sailing through the forty miles of islands—there are said to be a hundred and seventy-three in the San Juan group, half belonging to Canada and half to the United States—where wood and field and farm, rock and mountain and waterfall combine themselves and their inland delights with "The mystery and the magic of the sea".

Dum's latest stage-play was thrust forgetfully aside, though in Et's glowing enthusiasm, wherein she punctiliously avoided the young man's word and

glance, I suspected a mere treasuring of her annoyance until the first moment of leisure.

When we docked at Bellingham, I told Dum to walk ashore with her, while the Skipper and I drove into the shed for customs examination. Before this was completed we heard, "All aboard!" for it seemed the vessel remained in port only a few minutes. Turning, to find Dum at her elbow, the Skipper demanded, "Where's Et?" "She refused to have anything to do with me," Dum warned us abruptly and almost at the same moment we caught sight of her, grandly coming out of the cabin on the upper deck. It was too far away to shout.

"Good heavens!" Dum pointed urgently towards the gangway, "the ropes are off!" The gangway had started to rise on its chains. Before I could do anything, he was tearing across the wharf and down the runway to the slowly-lifting platform. Then, to our amazement, we saw him climb the heavily-slanting barrier and leap from the top across a couple of yards of bottomless space to the deck of the moving boat. Before we fully realized what was happening, the boat was out beyond the pier's end. Presently, by way of reassuring us, Dum walked to the side and waved his hand. Too late, Et had rushed back inside to try and find her way down. We did not see her again.

## CHAPTER X.

## AN UNOFFICIAL ADVENTURE

"WHY didn't you raise the alarm sooner, madam?" The officer whose cap bore the golden eagle of Uncle Sam's civil service was very polite. "Probably everything'll be O.K., but there isn't any 'next boat' to-day."

"Not another boat—till to-morrow!" The Skipper's eyes were filled with alarm as she fell back a step. "Could we wireless the captain for a special stateroom?"

"They don't carry a wireless operator, and there are no sleeping accommodations on board."

The incident was growing into a disaster. Turning to me a face blank by sudden misgiving, my wife whispered shakily, "What—shall—we—do?"

Ten years ago I would have laughed, but ten years of iron rule had warned me. "Don't worry," I soothed her, "we'll just go up to the hotel and think it over."

Once in her room the Skipper sank into a deep chair, torn between the necessity for chartering a special boat and wiring to her sister in Boston for forgiveness. It was half an hour before I could wheedle her into the belief that the mishap, a week hence, would remain in our memories only as a jolly lark.

As we awaited the docking of the ferry next morning, we realized why criminals, spies and others of a retiring disposition, seek the refuge of large crowds. The little group of wharf officials grinned friendly interest as to the outcome of yesterday's miscarriage of plans. We assumed a hypocritical air of lofty self-possession to conceal a curiosity equal to theirs and an expectancy infinitely more vague. Beyond the hope of seeing Dum and Et—I may have been inclined to expect Dum or Et—our anticipation was a blank. If Et had been carried ashore by a policeman, the Skipper would not have raised an eyebrow, and had Dum appeared with a black eye, I would have accepted it calmly, as the will of the gods.

That they should have appeared leaning over the rail close together, looking quite satisfied with one another and waving gaily to us like bride and groom was the one thing for which we were totally unprepared. The Skipper found grave cause for worry in this phenomenon and hurried us all quickly into the car, somewhat to the disappointment of the onlookers. As Dum jumped in beside me, one of the freight-handlers came over, presumably to ask whether he could do anything for us. I gave him the poor satisfaction of asking the condition of the Pacific Highway south to which he replied and, in a last futile effort to extract particulars, added, "You fellows and your wives needn't worry a bit."

Happily this remark did not filter to the back seat for Et had just passed the zero hour for her bombardment of the Skipper's abetting ear.

"No, of course I wasn't angry with you, especially when I remembered how disagreeable I'd been. Oh, but I was terrified when I knew I couldn't possibly get off.

"For a full hour I did nothing but sit and try to control my fear. I'd never been in such a plight. The only thing I could think of was to pretend by my actions that there was somebody on the boat looking after me. When I heard one man tell another that there was just a boat a day until next week, I couldn't realize at first what that meant. I'd have fainted if

I had. Not a thing with me, not even a tooth-brush or a nightie, and no money. Discovery of the last made me realize I was—well, wasn't quite proper. There was a numbness in my legs and arms when I tried to move, so I made a wrenching effort and got up and walked. I dreaded the moment when the first one to be aware of my plight would look at me, so I tried to keep away from people. Out in front, the west wind swept the deck like a hurricane. I didn't go out but, right up in the bow, I saw a hat pulled down and a collar turned up that looked familiar. It was Mr. Atwood. My heart jumped and I felt safe, all at once. He looked so perished and lonesome out there, too.

"I went back to my seat and seized a newspaper. I read it right through—I never knew there were such funny things in the back pages of newspapers. By the time I laid it down, my fear was all gone. Instead I frowned bravely and terribly in the direction of Mr. Atwood, because gradually I had come to resent his being there, his presuming to be my guardian. Can you tell me, auntie, how I could possibly have felt like that? All at once I just hated to think that he, of all people, should have been the person to befriend me. He hadn't offered to befriend me, but I just knew that's what he was there for. I deliberately steeled myself against him by repeating everything I'd said about him the night before. It was funny, though, with all my anger and resent-

ment, I never doubted for a moment that he was the most capable person to look after me.

"When the boat got to Sidney he came to me in the nicest way, and so that nobody else would notice and said, 'Miss Dolbrook, will you allow me to make some arrangements for you? This boat does not sail again until to-morrow'.

"I didn't answer a word. Think of it, auntie. Just lifted my nose and glared at him a moment as though he'd got me into the whole mess.

" 'Come along,' he smiled, but at the same time he touched my elbow in a way that—well, that just made me 'come along'. 'You might want this,' he threw me his light gray coat, 'perhaps you'd better carry it.'

"Before I could decide to throw it back at him, I discovered how much more comfortable it made me feel to be carrying something off the boat, and how silly and self-conscious I would have felt among people who were all travelling with bundles and bags.

"It was a quarter of a mile up to the little village. We walked it without exchanging a word. My shoes filled with gravel so that I groaned at last and sat down on a pile of boards. I was panting with the exertion and the discomfort. Before I could really see what he was doing, Mr. Atwood unstrapped my shoes, emptied them and put them on again for me.

"In front of the one slightly-interesting store-window, he said, 'Just wait here,' and walked away.

He made enquiries of a couple of men, who pointed doubtfully in one direction and then another. A slim athletic-looking man carried an empty box—I think it was an egg box—out of a building and threw it into a very shaky Ford in which sat a woman. Mr. Atwood stepped quickly across the street and spoke to them. After a minute they shook hands with him and he talked with them for some time. While he was walking back to me I saw the woman step into the back seat. She seemed different to the other women about.

" 'I don't think Mrs. Curlew would want you to stop here," said Mr. Atwood, though I felt quite sure that he was thinking of my comfort alone. 'This Mr. and Mrs. Granger will drive us in towards Victoria.'

"Mr. Granger was a clean-shaven man with fine eyes—so handsome that they were almost dangerous —not over thirty-five but hair quite streaked with gray and a thin face. His wife was, oh, such a sweet woman who at once gave me the feeling that she was mothering me by being an understanding sister. Their clothes were so shabby and old that at first I thought that such nice people must just have dressed up in them. They were English people whose speech was so cultured, and they didn't stare or try to find out if I was 'gently born'. Just lovely people who couldn't say anything but kindnesses about Canada. They liked me because I was an American and helped

me because I was in trouble. But, oh, auntie, they were so poor. I don't believe I have ever known any poor people well and I didn't even dream there were any like the Grangers. Of course, we never asked, but I gathered that Mr. Granger was a clergyman. Apparently something had happened and he wasn't in the church any longer. Naturally, I wondered what the trouble had been and when I watched the affection and loyalty his wife had for him, I wondered more than ever.

" 'We haven't got properly settled in our little place yet,' she told me after a while. 'I hope you'll be able to put up with what we've got for one night.' I tried to say I couldn't think of imposing on them but she took my hand in the most chummy way and said, 'But you really must, you know. I mean it. Going to a hotel, with nobody to let you have even a brush and comb!' She smiled so sweetly that I had to blink to prevent crying. 'It would be too embarrassing for anything. Here we are now at our turn. All right, Gilbert,' to her husband who had looked enquiringly over his shoulder. 'Miss Dolbrook is going to be our guest until the morning.'

"Soon we left the side road and bumped down a rocky, winding lane in the bush till we came to a clearing. The little barn was half tumbled down and the box of a house—I'm sure it had been abandoned once and then taken by the Grangers. Oh, the poverty of that home. They had nothing,

auntie, simply nothing. A table and the chairs made by Mr. Granger, and he was an awfully poor carpenter. One jacobean bed and another home-made one, and a dressing table made of a big packing-case. But there was a dainty muslin cover to it and just as dainty muslin curtains on the windows. Clean board floors, but no carpets.

"There was a little girl of ten minding two smaller children, dear little things, but their clothes were pitiable. Mr. Granger had a lot of chickens, and a cow and a field planted in oats with part of it a vegetable garden. After a while I went out to talk to the children and took the baby up on my knee and told them how I got lost. The baby stroked my face and the two oldest ones felt my skirt and said what pretty clothes I had. That set me off into having a good cry and the darlings hugged me and said their mama had told them I would find my mama and papa again to-morrow, and I was so glad that they didn't know what I was really crying about that I was able to stop crying altogether.

"Mrs. Granger pretended to let me help her get dinner—fried eggs and muffins and raspberry jam—and we had ever so merry a time over it. While the men were walking around the poor little farm we put the children to bed and then sat outside until it got cold. There were lots of good books, but I couldn't make myself read. I wanted Mrs. Granger to talk to me. For a long time she didn't drop a word of

complaint but I drew it out of her. She had been brought up in the Old Country and married Mr. Granger, who was an Oxford man, but he had been misunderstood—that's the only word she used—and they were obliged to try and bring up the children as best they could. She told me that their income in actual money was less than twenty dollars a month, beyond what they got off the place to eat. Think of that, auntie, if you can. In Victoria, where everybody seemed so comfortable and well-to-do; where I had seen nothing but luxury and ease and grand old English homes!

"Mrs. Granger and I slept in the bedroom with the children and the men slept in the barn. After the lights were out, I began to feel timid in that little clearing in the bush. The darkness was the kind of darkness I'm still afraid of, and the silence was so dead that the slightest stir was alarming. Then I saw a light as though from a swinging lantern and heard voices. It was Mr. Granger and Mr. Atwood walking past the window. For some time I could hear Dum talking and laughing over in the barn, and it made me feel safe, so I went to sleep.

"In the morning Mr. Granger had the rusty little automobile ready when we finished breakfast. The

little ones, who had had me up early enough to take me all around their little flower garden and through the woods to their favourite spots, came to kiss me as I sat ready to go. The mother had said good-by, but she stepped inside instead of waiting for us to start. I thought I knew the reason, so I jumped out and followed her. 'What can we do to repay you, Mrs. Granger?' I pleaded. 'We must do something—you've been so good to us.'

" 'Mr. Atwood has just insisted on Mr. Granger's accepting fifty dollars,' she replied, trying not to break down, but it was no use. 'Oh, I think it's awful to accept it. We're so——'

" 'Don't, Mrs. Granger, don't,' I tried to control her, but I was a poor one to try to control anybody. 'As soon as I get to Bellingham I'll send you another fifty. No, no! I can spare it very easily. You'll take it; it's for the children. And I'm going to write you, often, about them.'

"On the drive back to Sidney, we passed a lot of such lovely prosperous-looking farms that I exclaimed, 'Why don't you try one of these places right on the main highway, Mr. Granger?' but Mr. Atwood pinched my arm in a way that, yesterday, I would have said was very rude.

"And, oh, what a gorgeous sail it is through those San Juan Islands. I felt it was up to me to make amends to Mr. Atwood, so I let him talk to me all the way over and explain everything. Hasn't it been wonderful? I think it's the greatest experience I ever had. I know I'm awfully much of a child when it comes to real life, and I suppose it's good for me to be crushed."

## Chapter XI.

### DOWN TO BUSINESS—AND TROUBLE

NOW, people," I announced seriously as we slid down the long hill out of Bellingham, skirting hills and spanning ravines beautiful as the hanging gardens of Babylon. "We must make up our minds to travel faster, or we'll die of old age on the trail."

"How far have we to go altogether, then?" asked Et.

"It is seventeen hundred miles from Vancouver to the Mexican border—but every yard of it paved except about eighty miles in northern California. Then, from San Diego back to Banff will be about twenty-two hundred miles—and I think we'll take train from there to Vancouver."

"Oh-h!" Et caught her breath, "and how far is it back to Vancouver from here?"

"About sixty-five miles!" But before she had time to succumb to the paralyzing comparison, "I'm sorry we have to postpone showing you the great Peace Arch at the frontier, and the 'Big Timbers' at New Westminster. You'd simply wallow in the glories of the big timber, Et."

"Wallow! One would have to be pretty much of a pig not to be satisfied with wallowing in the other four thousand miles. But of course you're exaggerating? Four people could never think of starting out to——"

"Look!" the Skipper stopped her. "We're on the Chuckanut Drive. We keep on along this wonderful road, hanging between the cliff and the sea like this, looking down on those pretty islands, for ten or fifteen miles."

Et was subdued into silence by the magnificence of it, but when we came out on the flat country I began to wonder if her good spirits had been only an incident. After confirming my travel distances, the realization seemed to appall her and she became buried in a sort of gloom screen.

Then, the little towns in which we stopped got on her wearied nerves. The artistic "Tea Room" and "Brown Betty" of Vancouver Island became the "Good Eats", "Lunchateria", "Bert's Place". The moustached, knickered stroller of Victoria was absent and we had a close-up of the fat, coatless, vestless, collarless, pink-shirted garage philosopher. The visible population of Mount Vernon and Everett had a restless habit of congregating in cloudy poolrooms with gum-chewing, fuzzy-haired girls selling peanuts and "smokes" in front, and the horrible clanging of a mechanical piano at the back.

"So this," laughed Et, as we walked into a hotel for six o'clock dinner while a circle of drummers stopped chewing their cigars to smile at us, " 'This is my own, my native land'."

"Suits me fine," declared the hopeless Dum, "Give me up-to-date action with a little noise. And,

after all, Miss Dolbrook, these people are genuinely 'pleased to meet you', as they say. Whether they say it in Canadian, American or English the welcome of our northwest is pure gold every time, because it isn't the tourist's money we are after so much as the tourist himself. Getting his name on the hotel register is only a preliminary to having it on the voter's list." The words had the ring of friendly interest. For some reason he had abandoned his play-acting.

It was unfortunate that we should have had to go through Seattle at twilight without stopping. The beautiful scenes in and around this youngest and most vigourous colossus of the West, were to constitute the treat we promised ourselves on a later and happier occasion.

When we arrived in Tacoma it was dark. In the seclusion of our room the Skipper sank exhausted and it took me some time to find out that exhaustion of the road was not the cause.

"I'm afraid it's wearing me out," was her confession at last. "The girl is unnatural. She has been allowed all her life to be dissatisfied and wilful."

"Who, Et?" I questioned again. "Oh, I thought her adventure had reformed her."

"Wouldn't you think so, eh? She's so capricious —crotchety's the word really. She'll be at it again. See if I'm not right."

Sad to relate it was a safe prophecy.

## Chapter XII.

## WAS IT THE ANGELS WEEPING?

AT BREAKFAST there was no marmalade on the table, no scones. The chef, Et sighed, didn't know how to season an omelet; the coffee was passable, but the tea vile; the waiters were crude. "Those creatures of women" at the next table were "horribly vulgar with jewelry", platinum jewelry. They ordered steaks and their men ate fried fish and "stacks of hot". From the kindest of motives the "horribly vulgar" invited themselves to sit by our ladies while Dum and I fetched the car.

"What line did you say your husband was in?" they asked the Skipper. "We're located here in

Washington in the hardware, but Smith, he thinks some of sellin' out and going up into Canada." "What's your home state, Miss?" "Massachusetts! You ain't got any of our swell scenery there, I guess. You must be glad to get away from them old stagnant places and get out here where the towns are all growing." "Well, there's your machine waitin' for you. We're right pleased t'ave met you. Good-by, Mrs.—What's the name? And good-by, dearie. Tell the folks to come out to the Coast if they want to be shown a good time."

"Beastly people!" was the curse left upon them.

Humming along in the soft warm sunshine of sparkling spring, we had an exceptional view of Mount Rainier's 14,000-foot cone, sublime in its shining mantle of folding snow fields. To three of us it was not new, it was an old pal, a benevolent neighbour.

We waited for Et to exclaim.

In the course of a few minutes it caught her. She turned and regarded its white crown of glory, but was ominously silent.

"Isn't it beautiful, Et?" we asked.

"Yes, it is pretty." She turned subtly as I had seen her do before when about to punish us for what somebody else had done. "But, then, everything in the West always is so remarkable. Is it safe to admire anything? There are no geese in this country

only swans," just the flicker of a saving smile, "accoring to Mrs. Smith."

We were set down. "Strike me pink!" was the only expression that flitted into my mind. Even mighty Rainier blushed unseen as it diminished over our left shoulder. In the shadow of creation's giants one often revels in silence, but it is an optional silence; to have one's lips jolted shut is quite different. Et had successfully assassinated our admiration.

This morning's "eccentricity" was more noticeable than usual. For the Skipper's sake, I wondered if perhaps we should make a daily start at noon.

"At that garage yesterday," Et had added, "the greasy man insisted on knowing where I 'was raised', and then demanded to know if I had ever seen anything smarter in Boston than 'those two lines of stores on Second street.' Is everything really so wonderful?"

The place we stopped for lunch was a shop-front restaurant, in the middle of the block with a kitcheny look and smell, one of those places in which the tourist often has his first and only inside view of the workaday life of the towns which otherwise he sees as exteriors only.

Jack the diner discusses with Jill the tray-bearer the week's movie or Fannie's affair with Gus. Mr. Munny the town barber sat with another old man

and grumbled away the extra minutes required for his "chops fried special".

"No, sir, there ain't no use, sir," he whined, "for to depend on home trade. The people in this town thinks its tonier to pate-ron-ize the big barber-shops in the cities. Yes, sir, if their own business folks starves to death for it. Them bank clerks, sir, will go to Tacoma for a day and then, sir, they'll stroll by me, sitting front of my shop with nothing to do, and bid me, as cordial as y'please, 'Good day, Mr. Munny,' just as though I didn't know anything at all. I ain't been dancing round a barber's chair for thirty-nine years and gallopin' after hot water without I know a fresh hair-cut when I see one."

The conversation of another table centred on Charlie Patch's approaching visit to Portland to take his examination for his second-class certificate. The garage assistant said, "That boy'll be a big man in this State some day," and the proprietress joined in from her exalted seat at the cash desk, "You said it, Bert. Charlie's just about the smartest kid we've raised in this town."

"Believe me, Sid," the plumber summarized, "Charlie's a real go-getter. I'll back him again' any Yale or Harvard expert in the business. He's got the brains, he's got the grit, he's got the manner, by golly, that'll git him anywhere he wants to git."

Just then the screen door slammed and there swaggered the length of the place—all it had was

length—a man dressed in overalls and an undershirt. His rusty hair was a mop of perspiration on a very dirty freckled face.

"Soup, double steak and whatever pie y'got. And lemme at that sink quick." There followed a half minute of splashing and blowing before freckles re-appeared and flopped down to address his soup.

"When you off for Portland, Charlie?" ventured one of his respectful admirers.

"Huh!" Et wore a sort of I've-got-the-goods-on-you smile as she shrugged all over before stepping into the car. "So that's a western 'go-getter.' " She spoke directly at Dum: it was purely his fault. "A 'go-getter' with a manner." Her upper lip had a sort of permanent wave. We had nothing to say why sentence should not be passed upon us, so she finished, "He's just about four strata beneath a Boston costermonger I'd say."

That afternoon seemed to stretch itself halfway round the world. The matchless paved distances of the Pacific Highway became a treadmill, each town and hamlet flashing past was just one spank nearer the end of the whipping. As though disappointed at lack of appreciation, the sun sank behind black clouds. By the time we found ourselves alongside the stately Columbia, heaven was weeping copiously. For fifty miles into Portland it poured. The Skipper wore a look of collapsible weariness. She looked wearier today then yesterday, wearier yesterday than the day

before. The realization troubled me, but a man's trouble escapes easily.

Ensconced at last in our hotel—whose warmth of old fellowship seemed to shut out the day's chill—and with dinner over, Dum and I treacherously deserted and, in a music hall, sought the gaiety of a laughing pleasure-seeking, none too particular generation of light hearts.

## Chapter XIII.

## THE HEALING SHADES OF EVE

BY THREE P.M. a sizzling breezeless sun beat vengefully aslant our fretting brows. It had dried up the Portland streets, dried up the very memory of rain, had now dried up the last ounce of our patience and was rapidly drying up our blood.

Fuming, as men do, waiting for ladies to shop, Dum and I sat in the front seat, every moment waxing hotter inside and out.

"Stop here a moment," the Skipper had ordered in front of what we recognized as a "linger-ee" shop. "Et wants a handkerchief to send to her mother."

Up to date the length of a "moment" was one hour and forty minutes.

A show card in the window "Broken Ladies' $2.98" had amused us for five minutes; I had cursed an advertisement for a new haberdashery store, thrown into the car, then read the thing over and over to kill time until I got out and bought a couple of ties; then, after another intolerable wait, Dum puffed, "I'll have to get out of here somewhere—somewhere into the shade—or I'll be a casualty."

Hardly had he disappeared when the sorely-abused females flounced in upon me.

"Oh, let me sit down," panted Et. "We're wilted. I couldn't get one. They had nothing to choose

from, simply nothing. Hurry and get us out into the cool country. Where's Mr. Atwood?"

"He's in the shade," I sniffed.

"Oh, come, uncle, don't try to be funny, please. Why does he keep us waiting?"

"Couldn't say, I'm sure." I held my tongue in leash.

"But we must get away. It's excruciatingly hot. How can we find him?"

"Better ask that policeman," unsmilingly cutting off my own nose in my willingness to give them a taste of waiting.

"Well, what'll I say?" Et whined half believingly.

"Say you've lost a good-looking young man, and all you know about him is that he's somewhere in the shade."

Just then the shade-seeker reappeared and we started. The search for the Salem road was not at once successful for, to visiting motorists, big cities are like mouse-traps, easy to enter but hard to leave. Eventually however the sweltering streets lay behind, our tempers began to smooth out and ruffled feathers were laid back in the cooling wind of the glad Willamette valley.

Evening found us with time for a walk. After dashing through the day, taking fifteen-mile-an-hour curves at twenty, straining to pass the car ahead to save thirty seconds into the next town, and religiously denying ourselves the extra five minutes necessary to

explore a pretty village, it is a sort of purry sensation to stroll or laze along as though nothing is due to happen for a week. The tranquil relaxation of the delightfully quaint streets of old Salem in the last peep of day and the cool of sighing leaves overhead seemed to make downhill of it all. The twittering of a bird, its answer and their crooning into silence; the call of an invisible mother and the response of an invisible play-weary child coming to bed. There was a tiny cottage hiding in lilac trees but betrayed by the half light from an open bedroom window, where a young father was lulling a baby to sleep. As we paused a minute I realized anew the immortal harmony of,

"*Diddle diddle dumpling, my son John.*"

And at last the still small gurgling of a deep-down brook undermined the stillness, seeming by its gay contented purling mysteriously to soothe our minds and strangely to stir our hearts. That toleration of one another, to which the narrow limits of the car had drilled us, grew suddenly stronger and subtly into something better.

Et was a little way ahead with the Skipper. I found keen and fulsome pleasure in being able to chat unguardedly with Dum. The two men of an all-day motoring party are under restraint which grows steadily and tantalizingly until evening. This is the case even when the atmosphere is entirely easy and jolly, and ours was not entirely easy and jolly. We were

glad to be rid of those women ahead. Glad, as we swiftly discovered, in the same way a mother settles to her hour of enjoyment when the tiresome children are in bed. But, just as the mother wants still to keep within calling distance of the tiresome ones, we men ceaselessly and tenderly watched the pair we were resting from.

Confidence between two men is usually a dour wordless thing. The one wills, rather than tells, his secrets to the other. He opens his heart by a significant glance, an abrupt refusal to respond to questions, or a grunted word now and then—anything to avoid the effeminacy of gushing, the tawdriness of empty declarations of loyalty. By silence and sniffs and sarcasm Dum Atwood had tried to tell me that Et—thoughtless, over-indulged Et—had miraculously renewed his faith in womankind.

"Understand!" he made it plain to me in the cigar-illumined darkness, "I'll never put out a hand to take her. That would have to be a shabby steal sure enough." A grim smile and silence. "You see, old chap, I'm not forgetting that the special tinge to my nine-day fame is not the fashionable colour that mothers are commending to their daughters." More silence and apparent expectation that I would interpret the tilt of his chin as he looked earnestly, hungeringly, at the pair ahead. "Maybe my idea is absurd, Joe, but here's the way I've got it. The other woman looked like a rainbow, the real thing—and

she was only cheap paint. That little girl ahead there keeps on telling us that her character is paint—so there must be a rainbow behind it."

As we met them again in front of shop windows, there existed amongst us a new spirit of reciprocity. The women, too, had grown complacent in the recess. For the first time in all the two years—or was it only two weeks—since we started we were *en rapport.*

It was a propitious time to forbear and to forgive, for, at that moment, in a dimly-lighted tourist camp near the northern border of California fate was setting her alarm clock to awaken us into new things. Long before we should have opened our eyes on the morrow, this fate would be racing swiftly and straight towards us. How merciful it is that the shocks and pangs of life generally explode shortly in one amazed moment. From long range, with the sting of anxiety as a prelude, they would be unbearable.

## Chapter XIV.

## CALAMITY AND CONSECRATION

SLEEPY SALEM was astir long before we were. Family washings had long braved the battle and the breeze and all the early worms were well devoured ere we shuffled our chairs at the conclusion of a rose-scented breakfast in the hall of mirrors as we termed the hotel dining-room. By the time we were on the wing, farmers were away home for another load, the bees were thinking of lunch time and morning glories were nodding to one another that it had been a fine day.

Our run was to be Roseberg, a hundred and sixty miles, the first hundred of which the map showed to be on the flat through the fruitful valley. So, on through the peaceful cherry lands we whirled, Jefferson, Albany, Corvallis, Monro and Junction City falling behind in a memory of sunshine and colour.

The stirring city of Eugene we meant to add as merely another bead on the string. A battery-test, oil and gas while the ladies sought a hair-net and stamps at the post-office would give it the status of a semi-colon in the middle paragraph of the page we turned that day.

By suddenly deciding to lunch in the place, we elevated Eugene to the rank of a paragraph ending. How were we to know that Dame Fortune had marked the town as a red letter page in the story, which not only was unskippable but whose very memory would raise goose-flesh even at the end of the chapter.

The south end of Eugene is the University of Oregon, rambling old oak-dotted grounds, faculty buildings and Greek-letter "frat" houses.

With our rugs spread beneath the trees, Dum and I had forty puffs in lieu of the feminine forty mid-day winks we had found so necessary a part of driving by the week. Then, sleepily and laggardly, we followed one another back into our seats, all unconscious that that alarm clock of fate was at the moment emitting the warning click preparatory to breaking into pandemonium.

I instructed Et to vary our seating plan by sharing the front space with Dum who was driving. The college atmosphere had wafted her back to her effete East. For five miles out, by lack of word or interest, she visited upon Dum her acute attack of Bostomania.

At the end of that five miles we caught up to a long clanking train of Lane County road-making machines. It was on a sweeping curve that dipped under the railway line and rose beyond on a reverse curve. The machines were drawn by a steam roller at three miles an hour, so Dum pulled out, slowly and very cautiously, to pass. He had overtaken the middle of the train and was almost under the bridge when there swept around and down the forward curve upon us a California car at tremendous speed and evidently out of control.

The road-machines on our right and a deep ditch on the left invited no escape. There was a narrow half of pavement for our car and the runaway. Each of us sought the use of that narrow half strip. The result was five seconds away but inevitable.

"Stop!" "Pull in here!" "No, over in that ditch," ordered Et in rapid style.

"Shut up!" roared Dum, manipulating the wheel and the gears with lightning coolness. Our big car lunged backwards, its radiator swinging towards the ditch on the left, and the next moment the California car struck us.

The contact was sickening as our assailant, himself ricocheting to his right, twisted us in a half circle and finally came to a stop with his nose locked sideways with ours, his hind wheels in the ditch, thirty feet from the spot where we had crashed.

Everybody gasped. Et, extremely pale but tear-

less, looked fixedly but very queerly at Dum. She had not forgotten (but rather admired) his language. Without looking at her, Dum tested in turn the ignition, the brakes, the steering-gear, then cast grimly over his shoulder to me, "Shot!" and in a few seconds, "Come, we'll have to get out of here, Joe." We both got to the ground; his coolness by this time was gone for I noticed his hands shaking. The idea of Dum trembling for his own safety was absurd.

The Californian sat on the edge of the road. He was dazedly wiping blood from his face and the fingers he had cut on the windshield.

"What—were—you—doing—here!" he quavered.

"We'll tell the judge all about that," from the Skipper who was now thankful enough to be angry.

"I was only going fifteen," the man offered, staring widely. "The law allows me twenty."

Two wretched hours we waited for the wrecking equipment. Doing nothing was heavy work; I would have preferred some light diversion like sawing wood. Our suppressed energies ran to manufacturing a ton of regrets and bad words and hate. Our nominal output of hate was ably supplemented by the female of our species who were much deadlier in their regard of him they righteously regarded as our destroyer. It was Dum's whispered guess that settled the damages question. "His car was breaking the law all right," he summed up, "but I was on the wrong side of the road. We would have some diffi-

culty proving his speed, but he would have none proving our position. And it's illegal in this State to pass on a curve."

Although it was nothing short of suicide in the judicial minds of the ladies, I agreed to the Californian's proposal to cry quits, and fell to counting the cost. Our headlights were destroyed, smashed tire, mud-guards and running-board, a great hole in the radiator and a locked steering-gear. The gasoline supply leaked, the spark non-ested. But we had carried a heavy square bumper consisting of a nickel tube encasing solid oak. This had been shattered into practical nothingness, but it had warded off a couple of hundred dollars' worth of damage—and bestowed it upon our bumperless friend.

The remainder of that day was for us anabyss of gloom. The fact that the world about us seemed to trot on merrily at its work and play only deprived our misery of company. The smiling countryside, as we were dragged back meekly and dismally into Eugene, reminded us somehow of funerals. After the first reaction of relief we began telling one another, "It's the merest accident that nobody was killed." We were practically at the commencement of our journey, the next two thousand miles was to be an endless motor-infested world where shocking accidents occurred—the evening paper reported three of them. This mishap might be only a beginning. Was the effort worth while? The anxiety, the risk? If

we could only be back on the safe familiar roads of home!

"This blue funk moment comes once in every long-distance motor tour," Dum tried philosophy. "It's like measles or the inevitable row in amateur dramatics. Better have them over and done with. Anyway, more people die of measles on these roads than motor car accidents. You're not worrying about measles, are you?"

During dinner we had succeeded in forgetting, when we heard a man call to one at another table: "Didn't you hear about it? One of them was a Canadian car. This afternoon up near Goshen. Quite a bad bump they tell me."

In vain we placed ourselves in the liveliest spot of the busy rotunda. Crowds hummed in conversation, bell boys hurried, groups departed and poured in noisily with new train arrivals. Dum and I smoked. When Dum tries to radiate confidence by an attitude of unrufflable coolness he is an immense success, but even his easy smile failed to neutralize the atmosphere. It was all distracting but not relieving. When a pair of headlights swept quickly round a corner and flashed across the window we held our breaths, the sudden honking of two meeting cars made Et and the Skipper start in terror. A full minute later I would notice my wife's hand to find it twitching.

Inaction, we decided, is poison to splintered nerves. Somebody suggested "Movies," without

response. "Let's go in to the music," offered another. "Out to the shops," struck no mutual chord. "The dance announced on that poster," I ventured. Then another spoke—it was Dum's voice, though I could not believe it was Dum—"Prayer meeting?" And three voices echoed, "Prayer Meeting? Yes, let's go, if there is one."

The clerk at the desk tried to answer my inquiry without smiling. He quite agreed with me about the Wednesday evenings of our youth, but really could not speak as to the present day. Four people on different street corners tried to place the location of churches from where they stood, then looked after us, grinning. We found a Gothic stone edifice on a back street, but it was dark. The modern motor car has banished the evening quiet and the home life of the small city. The old-fashioned twilight of tranquility has become speed, glare and noisy alarm. The never-closed, hollow-sounding garage, the whirr and gear-gratings of crowded-in automobiles, the hivelike jingle of nightly entertainment and the stir of outrageous supper-hours fill the night. Parents are always away from the places we called home, there are no more children, only young people.

"Oh, I'm so sorry there's to be no church," Et spoke more affectionately. "I wanted something to take me away from the pace of life."

"What about that?" Dum surprised us. It was a square-looking wooden building with high and

broad windows of painted glass. The full lighting of the place was unmistakable. As we eagerly mounted a short flight of steps and crossed a board platform to another flight the oddness, the incongruity of our quest suddenly struck us.

"Four reprobates who don't go to church once in six months at home," I remarked amid a titter. "Don't let's get cold feet," joined Dum. "We've sighted land; pull for the shore, sailors."

The porch was bright but empty. With the rankling sounds of the streets shut out the sudden silence was benumbing. From within there came no voice, not so much as the creak of an empty pew or a muffled footfall.

"I don't believe there's anything going on here," whispered the Skipper, but she pushed the red baize door gently. The next moment we found ourselves in the sanctifying presence of God.

All across the field of pews were worshippers; old men and little children, bright-coated women, harsh-featured and work-worn women, girls with fresh cheeks sublime in religious inspiration. A palsied-lipped cripple and his wan little mother with closed eyes, on their knees on the carpet of the open aisle. Here and there a man stood, with interlocked fingers, ardent unseeing face turned towards us; a few were prostrated on the pulpit steps, but for the most part people knelt on the floor between the pews.

The spirit of worship breathed before us like a

living presence, intense, gripping, almost terrifying. Any but the least emotional must have been caught up into the clouds. Humbly we sought a bench at the back and there rested, rested for the first time in years it seemed. A woman, evidently an office-holder, moved softly in our direction.

"It is the usual evening consecration season," she whispered. "People are asked to attend independently and depart when satisfied, after prayer."

There was no clergyman, no reading, no organ. We became aware of a woman in the gallery singing or chanting,

"*Jesus, keep me near the cross.*"

The effect was that of a great healing reconciling cloak thrown over us, drawing us closer together because it shut out the world. The silence was so awesome it could almost be seen. Every gray head and youthful face before us acknowledged spiritual grace.

Presently we left the church, blushing rather than acknowledge to one another that we had been overwhelmed. Et walked ahead with Dum. "Just think," she invited his opinion, "of people acting in that foolish fashion. Don't you think—" She paused as though wondering how to proceed, but Dum turned his head to her sternly.

"No!" very slowly and definitely. "I think that we are the foolish ones. For my part I feel imbued

with the spirit of the Almighty as I never was before in my life."

Et breathed hard. It was not in anger but in an admiration of which for the moment she was afraid. "Forgive me, please. I think about it exactly as you do. I wanted to see if you—" Impulsively she laid her hand on his coat-sleeve and pinched his arm, "Oh, you're fine, Dum, splendid!"

But Dum was a hardened business man again in an instant. He was thinking of her overheard remark in Victoria. He would concentrate on that unpleasantness if it killed him.

## Chapter XV.

## THE SHADOW IN THE VALLEY.

NIGHT WORK in the garage and a merciless attack on my pad of traveller's checks in the morning and we managed a reasonably early start.

"Well, say it! *Say it!!*" Et scowled at Dum's puzzled lift of the head when she appeared. "I'm hollow-cheeked and shaggy-haired, my hat's probably on backwards and I look like something out of the French Revolution. They bullied me out of bed fifteen minutes ago—just about as I'd got to sleep."

Her exhausted condition, betokened by shadowy eyes, was without doubt entitled to sympathy, but her rights were faded out of recognition by a hostile demand for an infinitely greater amount of it than our combined efforts could supply. Her pettishness is a very vivid memory to me—perhaps because it was the last exhibition of it.

"She's a puzzle, isn't she?" Dum asided to me as we drove off.

"She's the most spoiled thing I ever saw," I replied, "but I've a theory about her kind." Dum's silence indicated his interest. "When a rich man's child is neglected, you know, it is a virulent type of neglect. The neglected barefoot boy of the family of fifteen has at least necessity prodding him up the

ladder. But let circumstances reduce the scion of success—before over-living has rendered him an irredeemable fat man—so that both he and Whittington are touched by the same spur of necessity, and breed will show. These card-table and cabaret wasters, for example, run to mighty poor form, but the fact is they're generally from the best stock in the country and they're the kind of gaily rigged ship that will outsail the hard-working lugger in the dirtiest weather."

"I think you're right, Joe," Dum agreed. "If this crowd was dropped down on a desert island with no machinery for keeping alive except our own resources that little girl would come up a game fighter."

Thus two doting impractical males absolved a pretty face.

My recent concern for the Skipper became today a real anxiety. The events at Bellingham had first induced a sleeplessness of which she did not complain and of which I alone was aware. Following this she had commenced sleeping at unusual times, queerly, and at a moment's notice. Yesterday's events had not helped. From midnight until morning her condition had been so disturbing that I avoided mentioning it even to her. From long observation I recognized the strained smile of good cheer and the words of exaggerated high spirits that heralded a coming crash.

The day itself was one of those crazily-planned ones which have obsessed many another touring motorist. Yesterday, the gods of evil had made a try for our lives; not content with beating them down to a fright and a half day's delay, we aimed to cheat them of their small gains by making up the lost time and distance. There was no excuse, logical or imaginary, for haste; we might as well reach California next week as this, but we were afflicted with the disease of the age, and striving to sacrifice ourselves to speed just as certainly as the ancient Bengalese sacrificed himself under the Juggernaut.

When we stopped for lunch at two o'clock the Skipper begged to be permitted to curl up in the back seat instead of following us. When I returned to her, the first moment I could do so without giving alarm, she was in an unnatural pallor of sleep. Almost with violence I tried to awaken her by speaking and shaking, and was relieved that she sat up just as the others appeared.

Then, watching constantly through the mirror, I saw her wilt suddenly into the corner just as though somebody had cut the string of her last effort to resist. Stopping the car, I revived her and whispered the encouragement that, at the very next house, she should have rest. We were thirty miles from our destination and further postponement was dangerous.

Dum had jumped into my seat to drive. As for

Et, she sat a moment numbly, one hand rigidly on the sill of the window while the fingers of the other felt falteringly along the seat-back until they passed me and touched the Skipper's shoulder. The sulkiness and the self-pity were all gone as she stared fixedly, unseeingly, straight ahead. Then she turned towards us, almost calm, breathing regularly but heavily all at once as though she had come to some momentous decision. There was nothing immediately to do, but she sank to the floor on her knees and tenderly smoothed her aunt's skirt, looking up as she did so into the now wanly smiling eyes in their last pitiful attempt to remain open. My own eyes met the girl's and in hers was humiliation too deep for words or tears, a look of terror and courage that instantly melted my heart towards her.

It was a little box of a house on a hillside, penned in by a white paling. I sent Dum in to announce that we must have accommodation for a sick woman. There was that quality in Dum which caused me to reject the possibility of accommodations not being immediately forthcoming.

Helping the Skipper to the ground she seemed so exhausted that I took her in my arms and carried her, with Et's help, into the one unventilated little bedroom which divided the rear half of the house with the kitchen. There was a telephone—one of those 4-long-3-short kind—and the available physician, young Dr. Busher, was summoned.

Out of feverish haste, in which split-seconds were counted and panic watched for an opening, I found myself cast into the lap of enforced idleness, a period of wretched waiting during which one had much better think absurd and trifling thoughts than none at all. I inventoried my surroundings, a rickety grandfather's clock that hadn't stirred for a decade, a slippery horsehair couch, some gaudily flowered platters and much begraped stains on an old sideboard. And, there in the midst of my slough of despond, I fell to thinking of how the Skipper would have danced with joy at the sight of these. Only Et found tasks to do. As she moved about there was an occasional click, which, I discovered, came from the colonial buckles on her shoes.

The farmer and his wife were childless people, their faces from the first, cold and suspicious. The man listened nervously to our whisperings about the poor Skipper's sleepiness and then, for some stealthy reason, fetched his wife by the arm out of the house.

Dr. Busher made up in professional air what he lacked in years. Pulse, temperature and respiration were noted. He listened to me with the intentness of a judge taking evidence, though his interruptions gave me that strange-doctor misgiving that he was more interested in the case than the patient. At the end I could not disabuse my mind of the thought that he had made his diagnosis from what the farmer had told him outside. He said he must first consult

with Dr. Playton, a senior physician in the nearby city, and was some time getting his connection.

"I felt you should know, doctor," he explained as he stood holding his note-book open in his free hand, "as you have been handling the other cases." "What?" "Yes. Yes I do." "A most decided *encephalitis lethargica*. The symptomology is unmistakable, with onset apoplectiform." "Yes," "Yes." "All right: Hexamin—ten-grain tablets—every four hours."

The farmer had come to the doorstep to listen, and when the doctor turned to make his anouncement the man's mouth hung open indread

"Mrs. Curlew may have sleeping sickness," the doctor presently told us. "I'm very sorry to tell you that the disease has been almost an epidemic in this part of the State recently." Like a dream I remembered reading the press despatches. "It has terminated fatally in several cases and two of our leading medical men have pronounced it highly contagious."

Outside we heard the familiar clink of a car being cranked, followed by the shortly-controlled discordant whirr of the engine. Our late hosts had unceremoniously and indefinitely abandoned their domicile to us.

"It is my duty to tell you," the doctor spoke weightily, "that there is a risk, I believe a serious

one. Nobody should be here unless it is absolutely necessary. Who are these people, relations?"

"I am." Et spoke quietly and promptly. "You and Mr. Atwood had better go."

My urgings that I alone should remain were heard patiently by Dum, though Et was so intent on getting the doctor's instructions that she paid me no attention. Soon the two men went out and down towards the highway; the doctor's car drove away; Dum bringing mine round to the side and methodically taking out the bags, which he started to bring inside.

"Look here, old man," I made a poor attempt to speak without emotion, "if this thing should prove fatal—" but Dum just stopped his activities long enough to smile a brotherly smile of courage and to slap my shoulder gently as though to say, "That's all right, now, but don't waste time."

Et had absorbed every word Dr. Busher said. In fact she continued doing things for which she had no instructions. If she found my frightened eyes following she promptly re-established confidence with, "A Dolbrook should know medicine, surely!" The aptness of her ability was almost uncanny, her cool practiced courage beyond my belief. Unconsciously I leaned on her strength and sank into the helplessness of my own forebodings.

Through the night I protestingly permitted Et to settle me for a few minutes on the horsehair couch and to cover me with a bedspread. I do not know

how long I dozed, but after a time my eyes opened at the sound of subdued voices. A lamp was burning just outside the door to the bedroom. I remembered I had the only remaining sleeping place and was about to sit up when I caught sight of Dum and Et standing almost in the doorway measuring something from a glass into a bowl. It seemed to take a long time, and I hesitated to disturb the process.

"You were a brave man to stay," Et whispered encouragingly as she laid down the glass and took the bowl from him.

"I had a brave woman to stay with," replied Dum simply, as she turned to go to the patient.

" 'Woman!' " repeated Et, stopping to look at him again, "I don't remember anybody calling me that fine thing before in my life, except as a joke. And I'm twenty-two—almost."

I noticed then that dawn was dimming the smoky rays of the lamp, but somehow these two did not look tired, though they had borne the heat of a day and the burden of a night. They looked sobered but happy.

My faint heart was quick to note the last as I leapt up to demand the news.

"Auntie still has a bad headache," said Et, "but Dr. Busher slipped in again and says that part of it is not serious." Then, after a minute's speculation, "Uncle Joe, I feel certain that this doctor is mistaken.

He's bringing in Dr. Playton to-day and we'll be sure."

At three o'clock the two physicians arrived. Dr. Playton had a long belt-line, gray side-whiskers, a roguish smile but no professional air to speak of.

"Well, well, well," he scolded in pretended fussiness, "what kind of a holiday is this to be having?" Then, as he came into the bedroom, "We must get you out of this, my girl, before Oregon loses its reputation as a health resort." The Skipper's colour betrayed in the vaguest way her late fever and she smiled without intending it. The doctor turned her directly to the light and, taking her face between his hands, he looked at her a few seconds with the kind of intentness that might have been play. Sitting back heavily, he removed his glasses and shook his head severely as though to neutralize his suppressed good humour.

"I'm amazed," he reproached her, "that a woman with eyes like yours would even think of having sleeping sickness." and the smile widened as it went around the room. Dr. Playton studiously ran over the chart Et had written, and looked sharply back at the patient. Again he lifted his glasses, but as quickly snapped them on again for a second glance at the chart. Off again for an instant and on his nose once more, this time for a detailed scrutiny of Dum, Et and myself. His manner at first had reminded me of a fond father diagnosing the illness of

a child's doll, but now he became the inspector of a country school. The nimbleness of his glasses was quite comical.

"Busher," he snapped, "take all these people outside and amuse them for a few minutes."

Soon the old doctor came out, tucking his glasses away in his pocket with an air of finality. His roguish smile was gone. Linking his arm in Et's he led her aside a few steps. As he lectured, the glasses appeared again in one hand and were rapped so emphatically on the other that I thought the bow would snap. After a minute I overheard, "Of course you didn't realize it, child, but she's fretted terribly about you." Then, after a pause during which Et tried to speak but could not, "Come, come! It's all spilled milk. I know you can be depended on now."

"That incident of falling down in sleep," he confided to me, "was a most suspicious circumstance, but there was evidently nothing wrong with her except a badly lacerated patience and the greediness some women have for taking the worry for the whole family on their own minds. There is a type of woman

who suffers cruelly in an atmosphere of inharmony. As a matter of fact, however, the trip so far has strengthened your wife rather than the reverse. You can safely be on your way in a few days."

## Chapter XVI.

## THE LURE OF THE TROPICS

THE COUNTIES of southern Oregon, under the benificent influence of good roads, are becoming a paradise, but to our eyes, that high-spirited morning we got away, the process was already complete. The Skipper's serene and smiling face was the rose glass through which we looked down into valley after valley of pure crystalline sunshine.

For three hundred and fifty miles southward to the Columbia and Pacific Highway streaks through the wide flat valley between the Cascades and the Coast Range with never a hill worth counting, but south of Salem they rise tier upon tier until five distinct "divides" have been crossed by wiggle-waggle bow-knots of concrete which in their ingenuity excite one's admiration and, in their bewildering twining and corkscrewing, surprise and delight the eye. At the foot of a tortuous tumble of five miles of peaks and glades lies the busy hive of Grant's Pass, emperor of the valley of the Rogue River. Here the highway turns sharply eastward for twenty-five miles to follow the Rogue and its tributary Bear Creek in preparation for the final climb over the high Siskiyous. Through the last fruitful valley and the orderly towns of Ashland and Medford we climbed rung by rung a ladder of roads and, with our never-failing travelling

companion, the Southern Pacific Railway, came at last to the 4450-foot summit and looked downhill into the promised land—the huge, arid, rock-begirt valleys of California.

"Oh pshaw!" impulsively from Et in an outflaring of her cavilling surface-soul, "is that—is that !—California ? 'Garden of Eden!' 'Flowery empire of the Pacific!' Why, it's actually ugly—"

"Stop, Et!" with a frown of severity on the Skipper's face. "Don't spoil a good day."

From my seat I became aware of a weighty silence, a silence charged with an uncomfortable electric suspense. In the mirror I saw Et, face turned away, blushing and biting her lip.

"Look! Mount Shasta!" called Dum whose business idea of geography is to study it up a hundred miles in advance of arrival.

"Not really? Isn't it glorious though!" enthused the Skipper who on the other hand goes in for an after-taking study of rivers and places. "Isn't that the biggest snowball you ever saw, Et?"

The speaker waited—we all waited—through seven tightening seconds of silence, for an answer. I ventured a second look in the mirror and promptly gulped. Little Et was crying; all by herself there in a brief penitent howl.

"Night after to-morrow we should be in San Francisco," I announced to relieve the situation, and

the effect was like that of the piano at the dull tea-party.

"Not really, uncle?" perked Et on a sudden. "Why, San Francisco's the first place I ever heard about in my life I think. But it was always such millions of miles away." Her eagerness left me feeling like a cat having its back rubbed. "Let me see, now. The night—after—to-morrow! That is, one day after, not this night, but to-morrow night. Well, even that's not long, is it?"

My niece leaned over into the range of the mirror to dab her red eyes. She had stopped crying laughingly; she did not care who saw, she rather wanted us all to see. She was saved.

All that afternoon we paddled along over roads for which pavements had spoiled us, for the northerly highways of California were not fully improved. From one point we could see the white cone of Shasta, wild in whirling snow like a veil about its head, then again seemingly low down by comparison with near-by brown hills. A few miles farther and it met us round a corner as an eminence stunning in its nearness and height; and anon it would be fallen to a new place on the horizon.

"The bally thing's shooting up and down like an elevator," wheezed Dum.

We stopped that night by the headwaters of the Sacramento River, thirty-six hundred feet up. Next morning the tang of the snow-laden Sierras was in

the air, but by the time we reached the first of the great flat valleys at Redding (where the real California of palm-trees and pavements opens up like the Field of the Cloth of Gold) the warm wind of the southland made the far-off peaks of white look invitingly cool.

Far on our left was Mount Lassen, the only active volcano in the United States. In a shop at Red Bluff we saw pictures of it in violent eruption, so on top of a fine hill we stopped the car for fully five minutes, giving the creature every opportunity in the world to erupt, but, in spite of two highly indignant and insulted ladies, it declined to perform.

That was the afternoon Dum and I invented what we called the female of the thermometer species. Our design was based on the weather grouches of our highly sensitized companions who seemed so very much more alive than we to changes in temperature as to require a large-scale instrument.

This we put on a card pinned to the light gray upholstery as a gentle hint against any too great glibness in grumbling.

We chose the east bank of the river and glided into the ample shade of the fine old town of Chico in the cool of the evening, if there is a cool of the evening in the flat scorching valley of the Sacramento. The hotel, however, was luxurious, electric fans numerous, the dinner delicious and the weekly dance gave us a

most illuminating close-up of the youth and beauty of the land.

Youth wore no vest. His stripling willowyness was softly clothed; soft shoes, soft trouser-cuff, soft shirt, soft collar, and—despite a practised air of case-hardened masculinity—soft face and eyes. Beauty wore a vamp-band and pink arms, snappy shining eyes set in an endless smile, bobbed curls, an odor of myrrh, a pearl sunburst on pink satin—I think it was satin. Anyway I'm sure of the vamp-band.

Without, the slender stately droop of the palms bespoke the tropics while the hot night breeze stirred the myriad leaves of the pepper trees. Through the haze of a good cigar came to us the realization that this was the California of our dreams. The languorous atmosphere of the orchestra drugged us into forgetfulness of any other place on earth. For the moment we were victims of the tourist's first weakness, the Californian's deadliest obsession.

Weary as we were, the lure of the scented breeze enticed us out. Far down the street we came to a park, and the haven of a seat.

"I'll stay here with auntie while you men have your stroll," said Et, but I demurred.

"No, no! I've had enough of this fellow, you take him."

"But Mr. Atwood's had enough of me, too. Please leave us here."

"Now, don't be mean", I insisted. "Young people should give old ones the seats. Dum has read all about California and can entertain you beautifully."

As we watched the little filmy figure, by the side of the large gray one, disappearing under the dark trees, the Skipper turned reprovingly.

"I wish you wouldn't do that, Joe. Of course I know it's all right; nothing is going to happen, but—well, the very fact that Et was so nasty to him at first is a dangerous sign."

"I'm hoping so," I replied unrepentantly.

"Joe! I'm shocked. You may suppose your friend is all right, but you may depend upon it that girl would certainly never agree with you when she finds out. Even if—Oh, please understand, Joe. They—It must never happen."

When we had all sauntered back to the hotel we decided to carry veranda chairs out on a gravelled courtyard surrounding a fountain. Through the remote but fully opened windows came the rhythmic shuffle of many feet as the dancers swayed to the spell of the music; then a magic silence but for the pleasant tinkle of the ice in our glasses and splash of falling water, and darkness but for glowing cigarettes. A fresh herbal odour came to us on a gentle Siroccolike breeze that lay rustlingly on the oak leaves overhead, bringing with it a sense of luxurious content.

"Quite a paradise in its way," I observed quietly to Dum as we rose to go.

Since his walk with her through the shadowy paths the young man's eyes seemed to follow Et with frank longing as though he ached to put out his hand and touch her cool fairness.

"Yes," after pausing long enough for the others to move ahead, "it is. A fool's paradise."

## Chapter XVII.

## LURID PAST AND FERVID PRESENT

TO the motorist in California a hundred miles float by like a reel that is run. Down the valley in the early morning we sped past the old stern-wheeler port of Marysville and, at Sacramento, right-angled in a bee line for the Pacific. Another hundred miles across the marshes and through a gorgeous cleavage of the Coast Range and the delighted voyageur is admitted to that world-renowned cumulation of cities on the sea, the chief of which, lurid in history by its years of gold and godlessness, having defied the destructive powers of man's iniquity and God's wrath, stands to-day a phoenixlike vortex of humanity rising and beckoning to itself the commerce of three thousand miles of land and water—San Francisco.

Passing walnut and olive groves, we came to orchards from which express trains were loading with millions of glossy black spheres which have forever blunted the edge of that by-word concerning two bites of a cherry. From tidewater at Benecia to Vallejo where we took steamer for the twenty-five mile sail down San Francisco Bay, we felt presently on our faces the not unwelcome icy blasts from the open ocean.

"Come, old chap!" I invited Dum, as the great skyline of the throbbing metropolis pushed up nearer

and nearer our bows, "You'll be able to tell us all about it."

" 'Man hath but a short time to live,' " he quoted philosophically, "but men are living to-day who are older than San Francisco. Eighty-three years ago it was Yerba Buena, with half a dozen houses. When Cabrillo discovered the coast in 1542 he aimed to visit all the harbours but missed the Golden Gate. Forty years later Sir Francis Drake in his *Golden Hind* did the same and spent the winter in a bay thirty-five miles farther north, and even when Captain Vancouver visited the State in 1792 he never bothered with this place. The Russians had a go at colonizing in 1812 but their stamping ground was up at Russian River. San Francisco was the last and least important of the twenty-one missions of California.

"But, within fifteen months of the discovery of gold in 1848, it had become a city of 35,000, five times as many white people as were in the whole state before, and at that I'm counting Mexicans as whites. During the next three years great fires had burned the place out six times. Hobos used to set it afire so they could steal something to eat or drink in the confusion. For a quarter of a century the city was a den of criminals. The only way anybody was ever punished was by the illegal methods of the Vigilance Committees. During a bare five years there were twelve hundred murders in San Francisco, four thousand being the figure for the State—fifteen

killings every week for five years—with one single instance of a legal conviction.

"But $2,000,000,000 worth of gold floated out that Gate you see across there, gathered from the country we've been through yesterday and the day before."

"And the last fire, Dum, the Great Fire," I asked.

"Yes, it was exactly eighteen years ago." He raised his chin as though to bring his gaze up to the now towering immensity of the place. "Twenty-eight thousand buildings crashed to the ground; over five hundred city blocks lay flattened in smouldering ruins."

"Yes, I can just remember it all," joined Et, aglow with sudden shy excitement, "I wasn't five, but what a rage I flew into because San Francisco had crowded the funny pictures out of the newspapers. What a horrid youngster I've been."

"Never mind, child," cheered the Skipper, meanwhile smilingly swallowing a lump herself at Et's amusing contriteness, "they have comics even in the San Francisco papers again now."

"The last time I was here," added Dum, "there were eighteen hundred saloons with doors swinging twenty-four hours a day. I remember saying to myself then that the waters of prohibition might flow around the world but they would dash harmlessly against this stronghold."

"Go on!" urged the shriven and recovered Et.

"Tell me any other dreadful things you know. I can hardly wait to get ashore. I never realized what a blood-thirsty, penny-horrible, dare-devil person I am. Take us to all the gruesome places and show us the skeletons."

Up Market Street the dense traffic kept me on edge. Riding and walking, noon and night, underdressed and overdressed, honest grime and sordid glitter, gray and gay, tramp and trader, San Francisco surges past in an endless undamable flood.

At the desk, in the thronged lobby of the hotel, I waited for attention while Et dragged like an impatient child at Dum to escort her around to see the pictures. Contentedly I watched them move through the busy place, her rapt attention alternately on the historical paintings and her guide, into whose face she stared with childish intentness and admiration, while every now and then when the crowd became a press, Dum laid a hand on her small fingers in his coat-sleeve to draw her shieldingly aside. The Skipper from her seat watched with an uneasy frown, while I smiled the complacent grin of a foolish man.

"Mail for you, Mr. Curlew," and the clerk handed over a packet, the topmost address of which promptly blanked my complacent smile.

While I do not believe in "hunches" I never disregard one. "Miss Ettie Dolbrook" in a fine ornamental masculine hand on a thick coarse-grained envelope implied merely what it set forth, neverthe-

less the aura of the thing told me it contained a disagreeable complication. For an instant I wished that it was not necessary to deliver it.

"Well, au revoir, you nice kind Mr. Baedaker," chirped Et as Dum left the elevator at his floor. "Remember, we mustn't waste any of our time indoors."

Five minutes later, as I was gazing across the proud fanlike infinitude of roofs and chimneys that yesterday was a tar paper camp, I heard in the adjoining room,

"Auntie! 'Know what? Clarry Wentworth—he's coming." There was a chuckle that was something like a cheer. "Oh, isn't he—isn't he a darling! Just think of his coming all this way because I'm here." Silence for a few lines, then, "Why he's almost in California now."

Poor Mr. Baedeker! And alas for the fascinations of San Francisco. Et would gladly have moved on that very hour. The unexpected breath of home and its still more unexpected thrill, as of a loyal love, coming to her in that strange-storied city had wakened the child-woman to an excess of responsive fervour.

All through that evening and the following day she romanced away the hours, radiating indiscriminate smiles, but which were in reality one long smile to herself. The city's sights faded from memory even before they passed from her eyes. At Cliff

House her only interest was a search for the writing room: she had thought of another way she might possibly let Clarry know. The mystified Dum hovered on the edge of a confidence suddenly denied him. His face was a queer composite of the forsaken and the unbelieving. In strange contrast to her one-time attitude of hostility, Et now smiled tacit approval of all he did and said, sweetly fell in with all his plans, nodded her absent-minded thanks—seeing nothing and hearing nothing. In short, she had with extreme politeness closed between them a word-proof door of cold glass.

Late in the afternoon we joined the mad automobile exodus southward from the city but, turning westward from Colma, found ourselves soon on the bare bleak hills many hundreds of feet above the stormy-looking face of mother ocean. About five miles off shore and perhaps half a mile high, an ugly bank of fog was rolling landwards. Our road was narrow and carved into the enormous hillsides like a deep knife-cut, with scores of sharp concealed turns. But there was little traffic and for miles no inhabitants. Presently the cold foggy air enveloped us, dusk of evening was coming down and it became a race against the elements.

Refuge for the night we found at the village of Half Moon Bay, in a chill barnlike relic of stirring old bar-room days. The rural silence of the place was intensified with the stopping of the car. Our

voices seemed to penetrate alarmingly. Inside, the falling of a knife on a plate echoed in the cheerless room. The loneliness was almost unbelievable after the movement and din of the great distracting city.

Afterwards I invited Dum to walk. Soon we were away from the town and alone under the pale starlight of a treeless by-road. It felt as though we had been dropped out of a whirlwind into the lap of nothingness.

I very much wanted to give him my confidence but, as my companion puffed with deliberation and waited for me to speak, it struck me suddenly that John Kemp Atwood was a very difficult man with whom to commiserate. His instant adaptability to ill-fortune, for example, made the bearer of sympathy feel for some reason tardy and flat, that resourcefulness which always kept him back from even the verge of defeat was nevertheless a veritable wall against pity.

"Old man," I told him without premeditating, "do you know that people would love you more if you had more faults."

"What made you think of that?" he turned to me sharply.

"Et. She's had word from this chap Wentworth. He's to meet us somewhere down the State."

"Huh! That's what it is, eh!"

Again I felt the invisible flaming swords. It was

impossible to be sorry for a man who had an entrenchment prepared for every emergency.

"You and I should worry, Joe," in tones to indicate that the perplexity had already been weighed and dealt with. "If he marries her it will probably be a good thing all round."

"Ah! You're too big-hearted for this ungenerous world, Dum. Do you know that?"

"No, I'm not either," he disclaimed. "It's simply that I never let my hopes and fancies get off the leash of common sense. I'm not going to aim at things beyond me and then look weak and foolish when I fail; that's all."

"Then for heavens' sake, forget it! We can't be human without looking weak and foolish at times. A man is only another kind of coward when he's afraid to aim because he's not sure of success. Try it; fail; look foolish; admit you look foolish, then the rest of us will treat you like a neighbour, not a paragon." I suddenly discovered that I had wanted to tell him these things for a long time. "You are a sort of mental snob, my friend; you scorn people who cannot always be mental and sometimes have to be sentimental. You can laugh with everybody, Dum, but have you ever in your life wept with anybody? Mixed up with your strength you haven't an atom of weakness. As superintendent of a big concern you're the finished article, as superintendent of a hearth of your own you're worse than virgin soil—

you're the ore under the ground. A woman may be proud of mentality in her man because it is something to show the world, but the thing she marries is his sentimentality because that's something she can keep for herself. His strength holds her respect, but it's his weakness that makes them one flesh."

"I suppose!" His voice was anything but angry. "But how does that account for her dropping me like a hot iron yesterday?"

"Honestly, I don't believe that girl realized she did drop you."

He nodded as though in acquiescence, then,

"I don't believe I'd mind if—" I never knew Dum's words to be shaky and husky before and I felt suddenly a new warmth for him. "You see I never hoped that my fool's paradise would last. But why doesn't she snub me, the way she did at first? That was in my line, but yesterday and to-day she's been so calm and considerate. I've never felt afraid of a woman before. It's this sweet preoccupation that does for me."

"Dum, old man, if I told Et to-morrow that you had a weakness for her or for anybody, she wouldn't believe it."

"You think that's the case, do you?" He smiled sadly and defeatedly at last. "Well then," he spoke very slowly, "I'll admit that it wouldn't be much of an effort, to-night, for me to register weakness."

"That, in the meantime, my boy, is too late."

An odd sound had grown into the night. At first it was like a great slow bellows overhead, then I recognized the "Boom, boom, boom!" of the sea on three sides of us as we came out on a point of land.

A while Dum walked along beside me, a queer, new expression changing his face. Then he threw away his cigarette and I had the intuitive feeling that with it, he threw away something else, for suddenly he put his arm over my shoulders.

"That's pretty strong medicine you've been giving me, Joe." His fingers patted my arm nervously as he tried to keep the thickness out of his voice. "But you're a good old friend just the same—a good old friend."

The fires of adversity were burning.

## Chapter XVIII.

## LAS CRUCES THE MIRAGE

FOR the next two days we burned up California. The redwood groves, beautiful Del Monte and several of the splendid beaches were neglected in our race after Clarry. It was not that Et demanded it, or that we fancied it, but we suddenly had an objective, and any kind of objective or appointment, on a long tour, is a disturbance and a mistake.

I invited Et in front with me so as to sound her about this Clarry business. I have always believed that, to a good listener, a woman tells all she knows. It was a mean channel to use in this instance, because Et had taken to confiding in me a deal more than I deserved, more perhaps than she would have done had she known the plot of my thoughts this morning. Perhaps it was my deserts then that I learned very little. Or was it, I vainly imagined, that there was little to learn. My predisposition against Clarry notwithstanding, I was prepared to give due consideration and respect to any well-founded love-affair of Et's. She was not in any respect the "petting-party" type of girl. Although Dum's nose was out of joint I had sufficient confidence in my niece to suppose she knew her own mind and was never the hasty-marriage kind. The more I compiled my Clarry-ology the more I hoped that he might be an

also-ran rather than an actual blue-ribboner. Et had admitted before we left Vancouver that the men of Boston were all qualified performers in the vicinity of the tea table, well Greek-lettered and high-hurdlers in the establishing of their claims to a lady's attention. She had spoken of Clarry as though he stood slightly above the dead level in these things. But, I chose to tell myself, his nonsuch merit was chiefly his letter received yesterday, and the fact that he was coming all the way to the Pacific Coast for her. This had cast about the girl a noose of romance.

Through the fruit-laden San Jose district Et continued to be an amiable listener but the fine views from the San Juan grade quite woke her into speech. Through the 125-mile level pull of the Salinas valley even the commonplaces of travel began to interest her once more. Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo (St. Louis the Bishop) and a five mile glimpse of the sea at Pismo almost made us a family circle once more.

The Skipper smiled at me in amused withering scorn when I suggested that Clarry might be a passing glamour. I was even wondering how much his coming to California had really to do with Et.

"How can this undergraduate afford to come out here to see her?" I inquired, with ulterior motive.

"He's a graduate, if you don't mind, not an undergraduate," the Skipper defended, "and it is quite natural that his father would want Clarry to have a

post-graduate course in travel before he settles down to the practise of law."

"Huh, huh!" I surmised aloud, "also that Clarry should not choose Greenland or Dutch Guiana as his means of seeing America first."

My life partner raised her eye-brows scornfully at this unfinished reasoning but did not deign to speak.

As for Dum, I alone had noticed the change which all must have felt. In ordinary matters Dum was what a pugilist occasionally is in the ring, a glutton for punishment. He took life's buffeting calmly and looked smilingly for more. But this passion seemed now to be in abeyance; he permitted his frame of mind to show. I'm sure Et would have been very sorry for him if she had known what to pity him for. As a rule his speeches have a business-like snap in each end. His first word commands attention even if it happens to be an interruption, his last one sounds somehow so officially final that it forbids further comment. I had never noticed until now how unsociable and forbidding a habit this must have been. He spoke to-day unpretendingly, apologetically, almost suggesting that probably some of us might reasonably entertain another view, and concluded as though expecting to be scolded. The well-assumed simplicity left in his eyes a softness, an invitation. It was somewhat puzzling as to what this invitation meant.

It puzzled Et, for on several occasions she turned to speak to him, on guard from force of habit, only to forget what she was going to say in wonderment at that new something in his eyes.

Thus the second day of the burning-up rolled itself behind us. In electing the places to receive our mail, we had avoided the names of the large cities and the small unknown villages, aiming at efficient service without the tiresome delays of large post-offices. For example, our strip maps had shown "LAS CRUCES" in type of the same size as Santa Barbara, thirty-five miles away, and about twice as large as that of several towns of a few thousand people. To Las Cruces, then, we directed home mail to be sent; to Las Cruces we measured all our distances and bent all our hopes the particular day it came within range. To Las Cruces Et had instructed Clarry to wire us. And now, as Las Cruces showed on our map at the foot of the uninhabited Gaviota Pass and a couple of miles short of where our road joined the sea, everybody was on edge with excitement. Letters! How many would there be? From whom? What news of the children? Where would Clarry meet us? Possibly right here!

Then we came out on the ocean. Las Cruces had evaded four pairs of sharp eyes. We had traced every turn of the road shown on our map; not a dog kennel was missed, but Las Cruces had simply slipped through our fingers. We turned and went back to

unearth this buried city. In two miles of road there were three buildings. At the gas station, at the little wayside inn and at the general store they informed us that they got their mail at Gaviota railway station. "Las Cruces? There ain't any such place", they told us, "but this is it all right!" It seemed, in short, that Las Cruces had the same status as the Old Swimmin' Hole. Et and the Skipper looked suspiciously at the store-keeper as though they intended to search him. Somebody must be made responsible for this blunder, and, in a case like this, ladies will not settle down to swallow their disappointment while there are any stones unturned or pockets unpicked.

We spent an agitated afternoon praying to the spirit of the United States Postal Department to listen to reason. Even Dum's activity for once failed to get us anywhere. From the nearest station he wired the dead-letter custodian in San Fransisco, wired the post office at Las Cruces, New Mexico (the only actual Las Cruces on earth), and he wrote letters on various and sundry clues, but our Las Cruces mail and Clarry's telegram are emulating the wandering Jew to this day.

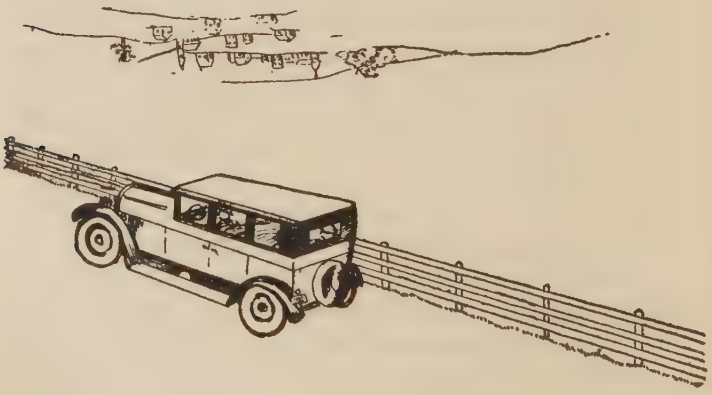
Et did not weep. Our final despair came with merciful gradualness. We had wasted valuable time —fifty or a hundred miles of time—also Half Moon Bay rhymed synonymously with wasted half day. It was heart-breaking, for it put our calculations out of kilter. We did not know whether to spring forward

like a grasshopper or wait for something to turn up, like Micawber.

The next morning we spent at the Santa Barbara mission. There was just a chance of word arriving from Clarry by noon and we were a rudderless ship so far as he was concerned.

Setting out in the early afternoon, our road continued to hug the coast line past the busy oil-wells working in the very sands of the sea, and the city of Ventura with its own restored mission.

For one reason or another we dallied, allowing the traffic (swift and numerous as we neared Los Angeles) to whirr past us. It was only the next day we recalled that oft-times useful phrase about the devil taking the hindmost.



## Chapter XIX.

## THE DEVIL GETS THE HINDMOST

THE trees in front of an old village hotel tempted us and we decided on an early dinner and an evening run on to Hollywood. While waiting for our order I happened to notice a man stare in at us from the street as he walked past the windows. He was noticeable chiefly for the reason that natives on the Pacific Highway in California seldom bother to stare at tourists. But in a few minutes the man reappeared accompanied by two others. After his initial glance, evidently to satisfy himself that our party was still there, the first man paid us no attention but his odd-looking companions, a big and a little man, kept peering at us until the last possible moment.

I quietly nodded Dum's attention to them and when we were once more seating ourselves in the car I nudged him. With hands on the wheel he paused a minute to take stock of two of the men, who were standing on the opposite sidewalk seemingly engrossed

in earnest conversation but unmistakably observing us and our car. I satisfied myself that, of the passers-by, nobody appeared to know them The big man of the trio was nowhere to be seen.

There was nothing necessarily suspicious in all this; just the same Dum and I took care not to manifest our attention to the pair.

When Et turned and asked Dum why we did not start he answered by letting in the clutch.

The rear-vision mirror is overhead and so adjusted that only the driver and the passenger in my seat, just behind, can command a range through the large back window of the car. A quarter of an hour along the road I watched a big car creep swiftly upon us out of invisibility, then slow down to our pace, fifty or seventy-five yards behind. In the ordinary course, this car should have passed us at once, but after many chances to do so, it was continuing to hold its position. Approaching a group of houses where people were moving about, Dum slowed sharply without giving a signal, to force the big car ahead of us. This position it declined to take, but slid up so near that it came almost alongside and, turning a moment, I recognized quite unmistakably at the wheel the tallest of the men who had passed the dining-room window.

A pressure of my knuckles in Dum's back conveyed my alarm and also the necessity for keeping our own council. He settled down to dividing his attention

strictly between the road and the mirror-view behind him. I have a dim recollection of hearing some questions from Et and the Skipper and my wife's final declaration, "Oh, leave them alone; they're just too lazy to answer, that's all."

The remaining half hour of daylight we measured shrewdly and uncommunicatively in connection with the deadly houndlike steadiness of that floating presence behind. I glanced at the strip map for an earlier stopping place. To the left on a side road was Lankershim, evidently a small town a mile or two off the main highway. Coming suddenly on the indicated by-road and without sufficient time to weigh the matter or more than guess the consequences, I leaned forward sharply, ordering ,"Left here!" Dum swung the car and we found ourselves on a much less travelled road, and with darkness virtually upon us. Too late, I realized that the move had been nothing but a panicky effort to shake off a mischievous shadow.

Our satellite had lost a little ground by nearly over-running the corner, but very soon he came swerving and dashing after us in a style which I could interpret in only one way. The second turn, to the right towards Lankershim, was now less than half a mile away. Dum glanced over his shoulder and, for no reason but fear, I whispered, "Faster! And right at the next corner."

The sudden speed must have carried a significance

to the enemy, even had he no knowledge of our mirror. Moving to the open side of the road and coming on at a furious pace, he prepared to overhaul us. I verily believe our summons to halt was due that minute, but just then two sets of headlights appeared from beyond the corner. Both cars turned in towards Lankershim a few yards ahead of us and, at some risk, we skidded the turn and in a few seconds had gotten in ahead of them.

"By golly!" I laughed nervously to the now-exclaiming ladies, "I almost thought that car following was a hold-up." The replies indicated a thrill of belated alarm combined with an excited gratitude that my fear was a thing of the past. Dum glanced no more over his shoulder. My stupid remark had betrayed the funk I was in. "Lankershim is two miles ahead," I offered by way of abdicatory advice. He nodded a severe acknowledgment that meant, "I'll take charge!" and I sighed a ready relief.

Dum hoped to keep our new neighbours between ourselves and the big car, but when next we studied the mirror the peculiar brownish lenses of the enemy were once more lighting us. On a curve he had somehow urged us to a speed that was leaving the other cars behind. Dum slowed down to close the gap. Things looked better, but suddenly one of our unknown friends stopped on the roadside and, almost immediately after, the other one turned and dived off along a cross road. Once more I had that hard-swallowing

sensation that our swift and strong opponent was bearing down. We had at least a mile yet to go so it was still too early for a spurt, as he would have outrun us in a few seconds. Our driver had to think in a twinkling. The occasion we all knew called for desperate measures. As the friendly pairs of headlights faded out the big car came on at once for a kill. We were helpless, unarmed, and we had the ladies. The temporary relief from my first long anxiety had let me down to a false sense of security, so I had no plan whatever. The Skipper held my arm; she was speechless with anxiety.

Et had now turned full sideways to face Dum, so that she could watch through the rear window and prompt him. Her black eyes snapped almost cruelly in the near-darkness, the fingers of her right hand were lightly on Dum's wrist as though the quicker to communicate a warning. The two whispered an occasional monotone together, sharply but perfectly cool.

At the moment the opened cut-out sounded to warn us (or was it to awe us) she asked in tone of alarmed confidence,

"What are you going to do?"

His reply came like a trip-hammer.

"Try to run him off the road! We may be bumped. Will you risk it?"

"Yes, if you think—"

There was no time to think. For a brief second

Dum's purpose halted. It was when the piercing imperative "Honk, honk!" came from behind, and he pulled back to the right a moment in instinctive trained response to that sound. Then, when the other's bumper came within ten feet of ours, Dum bent savagely over the wheel and twisted, to send us slanting across the road to block the progress of the big car—or to be rammed by it.

At the same moment I saw him take his right hand from the wheel and shoot his arm across in front of Et, presumably to save her from being sent against the windshield if we wrecked.

Now it was the enemy's move, his turn to think swiftly, to make or break a plan. As a real general at the game of hold-up he probably remembered that a wreck attracts a crowd anywhere and renders a getaway doubtful. If he failed to remember this his action was merely the same instinct that made Dum jump away from his honk. At any rate he swerved to the left to avoid a collision and, as his speed was ten miles faster than ours, and we now had the left side of the roadway cutting him off, the enemy crashed promptly into the shallow ditch, which was exactly where he was supposed to go.

Two or three seconds of shouting and unrecordable expressions, and our would-be beneficiaries were as a stingless snake, yea, even as wet powder, except that, by way of very weak and very unprofessional afterthought, one of them yelled, "Help, help! Stop!

We're hurt!" which was very easily translated into, "We're hurt you don't stop and let us help ourselves."

As we drove along relieved and safe, the spirits of the party assumed that bubbling unanimous self-congratulatory noisiness that is the reaction to fugitive danger. While the Skipper and I talked excitedly Et's two eager hands seized the arm that would have protected her, while her tear-glistening face came close to his ear into which she spoke with trembling agitation, "Bravo, Dum! Bravo!"

At the curbstone in Lankershim we discovered that we still had a great deal of exuberance to talk off. The suggestion to retire found no response while a motion for hot coffee and toast was carried on a snap vote. The first sign we saw sounded just the thing:

TIM'S PLACE

GOOD EATS

"A BIG BITE FOR A LITTLE BIT"

It was only after we got inside that we noticed how tenth-rate was the place and its patronage.

"Hey! Blossom," shouted the cash-register girl in the direction of the kitchen, "Party-two-ladies-two-gents."

The waiter Blossom, a slant-eyed poker-faced individual, took our order savagely, deriving only the

poor pleasure of informing us that delivery would be "Some while."

"Bloss-om!" called the girl again after a few minutes, as she held the telephone receiver in a bored way, "you're wanted."

What Blossom might have been wanted for would have been of no interest whatever except that Dum and I, who sat facing the telephone, noticed his waxy features stir instantly to life.

"When did youse get in?" he asked by way of absurd stage-whisper. "You're not in? Well, where—" Long pause, but eager nervous attention. "Crowded y'into the ditch? Say!—look here!" Blossom fitted an action to his word and peered stealthily around amongst the tables, but apparently nobody was listening. "Awful busy, right now. Yep! Sure! You'll be spending the night at my place anyhow." "Yep, a'right; get the dope later."

Dum and I frowned on one another an instant and once more became part of our laughing safety-valve rattletrap party. But when our quarters for the night had been arranged we decided to "Go for a walk."

"Can you tell me where Blossom hangs out?" Dum asked a darky who was locking up "Tim's Place."

"Yes, sah! Avenue H, just de first right hand doah across the tracks."

When we crossed the tracks the light from the

lower uncurtained foot of window easily indicated the meeting spot at Blossom's "place." After many precautionary glances up and down and 'round about, Dum and I stepped off a badly-repaired wooden walk and counted the three men of the wrecked car, each, in spite of his hurts, doing justice to a meal and an uncorked bottle. Blossom was evidently a better waiter at his own place than at Tim's place, though here he had full license to abuse his friends for their failure. Once or twice when a disagreement raised the voices we heard the tall man who had been the driver addressed as Gates. On his part, Gates vociferated lustily, so that we occasionally caught a word of his high-pitched voice which in its rasp reminded me somehow of the snarl of a chimpanzee I once saw angered by boys.

Full of ideas of police and gaols, we hurried back towards the chief centre of Lankershim, until Dum began to reason.

"What are we going to—say—about those four men back there eating a supper? We haven't got a pin's worth of evidence that they were going to rob us, but they can prove darn quick that we turned out without any excuse or signal and wrecked their car."

"They're probably marked men," I offered.

"All the more reason why the police won't make any arrest until they've got the goods on them. Even if every one of them is 'wanted' it will just

mean that we'll have to wait around here for a week to give evidence. Is it worth it?"

Disappointedly, I was won over to his reasoning. At the same time I felt a distinct hunch that it could not be the end of the matter; that we would hear about it again. This suspicious belief was partly justified the following morning. Driving out of Lankershim, we caught sight of the familiar front of the big car, damaged and a wheel off, in the doorway of a garage.

"Whose car is this" I asked a mechanic, getting out of ours as though merely curious.

"That car, sir, was stolen yesterday from King City, and left up the road a piece in the ditch, wrecked."

## Chapter XX

## FALLING FROM CLIFFS AGAIN

AN oddly embarrassing incident had occurred at Santa Barbara.

The thermometer got up over a hundred that afternoon and our suite in the hotel —though so delectably appointed that even we men raved about it —was oppressive in its hot odour of roses. After shedding my damp garments I lay deliciously on my couch after the manner of Cleopatra—minus the ebonized fan-girls—but very soon roused myself out of queer daylight dreams in which I was being drugged by that heavy, head-filling odour. The Skipper and Et also felt the oppression of it, so we three voted for the lower veranda even with its unfortunate legal requirement as to clothes.

It was an atmosphere of confidences. For a while Et extinguished herself in silence, a rarer practice than at the commencement of our holiday but more dangerous. She was not listening, but looking with dreamlike fixedness amongst the palm-trees.

I thought of Clarry, but felt instinctively that he was not the cause. The Skipper announced her intention of looking over the bookshelves and went away.

"You remember that moving picture at King City last night," Et burst out suddenly from her meditation.

"Huh, huh!" I yawned, "the freckle-faced farm boys around us were the real show to me." It was a poor start but I wanted to turn the subject, for I knew at once what was in her mind.

"In that scene on the quay where the girl Phyllis is watching the hydroplane," she sounded like someone commencing a story. I remembered the play perfectly well but had hoped Et had forgotten. The heroine had unconsciously walked off the edge and the shallow waves and barnacle-covered rocks were an appalling space below. "The hero was there to save her all right," Et continued, "but the hero couldn't save her. I never realized before how almost impossible a feat it is for one person to save another toppling from an edge if she has actually commenced to fall."

"Pshaw!" I sniffed, in a reckless attempt to divert her attention, "that escape was nothing to the scene where the tailor-made hero knocked out the four thugs one after the other. Did you ever stop to think that the trained fighter always wins a fight except in the pictures. And thugs are more than

trained fighters, they are trained tricksters and foulers in a mix-up. Yet the movie hero, who is junior partner in the old reliable law firm, invariably—"

But Et has a cave-woman method of rough-shodding in pursuit of her point, a method which thrusts away all such deterrents as politeness. Her determination, now, plainly did not run in the line of a general discussion.

"It was a good piece of moving-picture work," she persisted, "the way that huge mastiff caught the hero's coat-sleeve with his teeth and apparently pulled them both to safety. It made me think of—"

"Oh, in the movie business they do fake things," I stalled weakly. "For instance—"

"You remember that afternoon in Vancouver when I nearly went over the cliff at Point Grey?" Without waiting for an answer she went on, "All I remembered at the time was that I was falling, then that I was back from the edge, on the ground, lying on your arm, uncle Joe."

"Yes, Et, something like that." I tried to appear irritated, feeling somehow that a confidence of Dum's was involved. "I don't believe I want to think about it."

"After seeing that picture last night," Et resumed with an air which seemed to dare me to try to escape, "I can very distinctly recall something more. I remember falling and you catching me. Then we both were falling, when something pulled us. Now,

I was thinking—" She interrupted herself. "Uncle Joe, are you sure that Mr. Atwood was really reading his paper all the while it was happening? He's not the kind of man who stands aloof from danger. He simply couldn't do it in fact. Don't you think—?"

"Oh, I dunno. He probably was." Taking up my own paper and shaking it out. "I certainly never saw him get out of the car."

Et turned and looked at me, steadily and judicially, then smiled a sly little smile. That smile said plainly, "Liar!"

## Chapter XXI

## THE INTOXICATING GLAMOUR

"UNCLE," whispered Et, insinuating herself a little closer to me that morning as we were steering for the mysteried gates of Hollywood, "don't you think I might do as a movie queen?"

I agreed with her, most nimbly. Anything to avoid a new trial of the Point Grey cliff episode. The one place for which she had been willing to forgive the trip, to forgive the whole West, had been Hollywood. The Clarry hunt had diverted her attention, it is true, but in the meantime Clarry was not materializing and Hollywood was. A woman must be very much in love to forget her pet conceits, therefore, I reasoned, Et was not very much in love.

"I just know," and the emphasis was most candid

and artless, "I know I could do it," and her gesture excitedly ordered me to confirm the rumour.

"No doubt you could, my dear." My acquiescence was genuine enough; in fact as I looked sidewise at her little jewel of a nose I repeated, "Of course you could."

After passing the enormous fenced organization of Universal City and as we were straightening our ties or tucking away our curls in anticipation of entering Hollywood, we entered instead the Cahunga Pass, a long narrow defile connecting the valley of San Fernando with the plains of Los Angeles.

"So this is the neck of the bottle through which the military history of California has trickled." His smile made it plain that Dum did not consider himself on any very hallowed ground.

"Military history?" we asked in chorus.

"Yes. These moving-picture directors should read up on it. The studio wars are much too reckless of human life if they only knew it. A few supernumeraries bite the dust every year in their battles, but the old Spaniards carried on wars without killing anybody. Some day when California's military history is reproduced in cyclorama the comic opera impressarios will go crazy about the scenic rights."

"Tell us about it."

"In 1831 a governor named Echeandia who had been fired from the job set up a government of his own here in Los Angeles, so the new governor, Man-

ual Victoria, started south from Monterey with an army of thirty men to crush the rebellion. Echeandia rounded up about a hundred and fifty followers and they came out and met the government forces right here in this neck of the hills. One of the rebels rode his horse at an aide of Victoria whom he shot down after they had both missed one another with lances. Then, while the rest of the army looked on, he started to assassinate the governor who, however, promptly dragged the smart-alec to the ground and ran him through the body. But the army of twenty-nine had taken fright, and Mr. Victoria pirouetted with them and then surrendered.

"The next rebellion was in 1838, when the battle took place at San Buenaventura, a little way across the hills. These old fighting dons and half-breeds would do anything in reason so long as they didn't have to expose themselves to any danger. This time they had a hundred men a side and after they had fired their blunderbusses at one another for two days a government soldier was accidentally killed, so the governor, Carillo, ordered the retreat and made terms."

"What happened next?" exclaimed Et, eyes a-sparkle as though listening to a funny fairy tale.

"Well, they didn't have another rebellion for almost four years. This time it was ever so serious an affair. The governor, Micheltorena, came from Monterey and picked up about four hundred men on

the way. The Californians met him here at Cahunga. They had two cannons against three in the Mexican army, and the two-day battle was between these five guns. The casualties reported were a horse killed and a mule wounded. The government army couldn't stand the carnage so they surrendered and Micheltorena was shipped out of the country."

"It was five years later, in 1847, that the Americans came along, and once more it was in this same Cahunga Pass that General Fremont received the capitulation of the Mexican leader, Andres Pico."

"But I imagined that Los Angeles was a new place," volunteered the Skipper.

"Nothing of the kind. As a city it is fifty years older than San Francisco."

We probably expected to find Hollywood a gigantic circus with flags flying, trumpets fanfaring and medieval soldiery medievalling, while lines of delectably handsome and beautiful *dramatis personæ* moved in a cue past the pay-window to receive checks for twenty thousand dollars for their week's work. In the Cahunga Pass we noticed a hillside encampment of Indians ("Open 11 to 5, Admission 10¢") who were employed on "The Covered Wagon" production but, other than this, our first glimpse of the place might have been in any other city stocked with cinema palaces, except for a notable clue which germinated in the feminine mind. The business section of Hollywood displayed a string of "exclusive places" pro-

claiming the existence of a population that buys without asking the price, a population whose riches are acute or accidental rather than hereditary or chronic. While this Crœsian neighbourhood was being thoroughly window-shopped, I presented a letter I had been given to the head of an important public organization. The mogul himself was out but his secretary tried to do his duty. "I suppose you have planned to visit the studios," he smiled. I left my name and address, nursing the satisfaction of knowing that my introduction was one which the great man could not ignore.

"The great mogul will send us word later," I told the others and Et hugged herself in anticipation.

At least our arrival at the hotel was fortunate, for it was the occasion of the weekly dinner-dance. The very briefest survey of the sparkling dining-room was satisfying in one particular, for moving picture people are undeniably beautiful specimens of the animal woman and the animal man. The napery of all great hotels is a setting for glittering gorgeous women but the types of Hollywood are chosen not for their colouring or marble beauty so much as for expressiveness of feature and symmetry of form. And, then, there are names, names! And who does not worship a household name, when its owner stands before him, clear eye and warm flesh?

The place fairly purred in its chorus of dreams come true. If you closed your eyes it was an atmos-

phere through which one might push his fingers in search of the lost chord or the sea-serpent, hidden amongst the weird strains of the orchestra. For us the occasion was one of double gratification, for nothing stimulates the enjoyment of a woman quite so much as having the opportunity and equipment to appear to advantage in a brilliant company. Many of our fellow-diners were those indirectly connected with the colony, publicity men, photographers, and wives of directors. Several times it happened that a man, passing amongst the tables and greeting various parties familiarly, would turn to us as though quite expecting to recognize acquaintances in Et and the Skipper. This complimentary suggestion added a drop to their cup of pleasure.

While Dum watched the happy face of Et, prepossessed and roseate in its rapidly altering shades of animation, an unguarded smile of admiration played in his eyes. He was wondering about Clarry, also about the girl's last week's pouts of impatience, the week before's curves of discontent and the first week's frowns of selfishness.

"Oh-h! *Isn't she* beautiful—simply gorgeous!" Et was whispering again, her hand quivering on the Skipper's in a fresh excitement as there swept past us a pair of high narrow shoulders dazzlingly white beneath a raven coiffure, a perfect mirror of grace and ornamented with ear-rings which swayed as the wearer's sinuous body prepared to sit, gathering in

long jewelled fingers a gown that looked like the blending of a full-rigged peacock and Joseph's coat.

"Aren't—they—all—simply—lovely," echoed the enraptured Skipper.

Out in the ball-room the scene became livelier and our ladies' cheeks even brighter. New groups, beautifully or flashily dressed, kept arriving, to admire or to be admired. One after another, young woman or youth gliding in the dance attracted our puzzled gaze until one of us would exclaim, "I remember! He was the blond king in that Nordic play," or, "Of course! In the boarding house comedies. You must have seen her, the girl with the sharp nose always falling with the plates."

Even after we had found our dim corner of the veranda, with some long cool glasses of lemonade, the Skipper was still too engrossed in play drama to appreciate the play of youthful passions going on before her. Emboldened by Et's preoccupation, Dum's gaze was now openly, helplessly devouring. "O dear!" came my niece's oft-repeated sigh, "I wonder if the mogul will do it for us!" She was fame-inspired and stage-struck in the last degree and everything else was a blank. There appeared to be no huge difficulty in the curing of her weakness, but I began to wonder about Dum's. I fell to trying to read the mind back of his suddenly ardent eyes. From the elevation of my greater years I had watched him grow up from a foolhardy youth to manhood,

mentally quick, brutally patient in adversity, strong in temptation. His manner of dealing with temptation had been ever the same. He never avoided it; he more than faced it. He seemed to take delight in building it up before him like a picture puzzle, looking at it squarely from angle to angle, then, when the game did not promise to be worth the candle, he would unconcernedly sweep it from his sight. I cannot think of a man in the world who could be trusted to deal more sagaciously and justly with temptation.

But the steel-walled, temptation-proof man or woman, though laudable in copy books, is in one way unmagnetic as a companion. We feel of him or her as we do of the man or woman with wings clipped beyond the possibility of an adventure—pillar of rectitude stuff. I wanted Dum to prove vulnerable. For years past I had wanted to see him in love, uncalculatingly, head-over-heels in love. It was the one phase of life we looked at differently and, for him, this gift of love I coveted. But, now, with fulfilment of my hopes imminent, I was afraid for him. His more frequent confidences told me how hopelessly beyond reach the pendulum had swung, whether he knew it or not. The impulse seized me to lay a rough hand on his shoulder, wheel him round and fire at him, "Careful, my friend ! Don't you realize it's slippery going?" I recalled his words at Salem, but watching him to-night, thoughtlessly, recklessly building up the picture puzzle of this new tempta-

tion, I wondered if he had the heart of oak necessary to sweep it from his sight.

"Nor me!" he frowningly shook his head in agreement of my lack of interest in the studios, while the ladies prattled together. "I've never got over the idea that all this movie mummery is for children. I'm for moving on. I want to meet this fellow Wentworth as badly as she does."

## Chapter XXII.

## TAKING A STITCH IN MEXICO

"HAVEN'T brought you out of bed, have I, Et?"

My eight o'clock telephone call had been tardily answered.

"Well rather!" the sleepy voice drawled, and then she laughed. "I'm not sure I feel quite maidenly standing here like this talking to a man—even a respectably fat one like you."

"The grand mogul is fixing it for us. We'll have to wait till to-morrow morning, but it's all ri—

"Goodie, goodie! Oh I'm so glad! I'm dancing, can't you see! Oh, wow! My pyjama—" There was a funny snickering, which naturally piqued my imagination, and she hung up.

Her smile was almost tearfully vexatious as she greeted us when we appeared downstairs. "I've had a walk and I've waited ever so long. What's the matter with you all?"

'What's the rush, it's to-morrow we're going—"

"Yes, yes, I know! But I'm too excited to stay still. Did he say which studios?"

"Oh, two or three I suppose, of the two or three score of them hereabouts."

It was Dum, coming to breakfast late, who brought in the mail we should have had on arrival.

There was a letter from Clarry postmarked San Diego. The mark was three days old but to a woman a letter is always dated the morning she gets it. Et's eyes blinked and snapped as she read. She breathed deeply, gulped and sighed. For some minutes she sat silent, picking mechanically at the fruit and the toast. Nothing but seriousness was in her face.

"Clarry's been waiting for us," she answered the Skipper's glances at last. "He's awfully disappointed."

"And we can't get there now until the day after to-morrow probably."

"Auntie—? All of you—? I wonder if you are interested in seeing the studios as much as I—was?" Two of us promptly declared that our interest was merely incidental. The Skipper swallowed (almost invisibly) and smiled sweetly that she was quite willing to fall in with any plans.

"Unless—you feel that we must—visit the studios—I—we—had better hurry. Clarry is just lovely about it, but we're spoiling his holiday. Could we go at once, Uncle Joe?"

Dum wickedly pinched my arm as we walked from the dining-room.

By a compromise decision we drove around through the studio section on our way out to Pasadena. The imposing array of guards at the entrances and the great broad-roofed buildings reminded me of a world's fair. Through a gateway we caught sight of some brightly-costumed men and women being arranged before a make-believe castle. Even Dum and I felt the thrill of curiosity, and the Skipper, realizing how near she had been to a dream world, ventured with innocent slyness,

"You're quite sure it wouldn't be worth waiting a day for, Ethelfrinda?"

The girl looked yearningly through the wide opening and I thought her eyes filled sorrowfully as the high gates swung and closed us out from the promised land.

The disappointment on the Skipper's face was, perhaps fortunately, unobserved by the eyes of youth, for I am sure Et would otherwise have turned us all back. And then the history of many queer things, now dear to us, would have been changed.

"I'm heart-broken, auntie, that we can't stay. But I feel I've promised Clarry and—No, I wouldn't risk it."

Apparently Et was at least more in love than I had thought.

My promise to have the party in San Diego by

two o'clock was bettered by half an hour. The morning roads were comparatively clear and before anybody was expecting it I was announcing,

"Well, this is the hotel."

"Heavens! So it is!" and fright jumped into Et's eyes as she instantly commenced feeling about for such earthly considerations as her vanity box and those outlaw curls.

But Clarry had left. For a minute, as she was handed his note, Et's face became a storm-centre. Then as she read, the barometer rose and, although bright sunshine did not register, the glass decidedly reached "Change to Fair."

It transpired that Mr. Wentworth had only three weeks before starting for home again. As our party was apparently indefinite in its movements he would move on to Santa Monica. In any event the meeting could not be delayed many days and quite possibly Mr. Curlew's car had stopped off at one of the beaches and he would encounter us before we got this letter.

Et agreed to completion of our run to the Mexican border.

Tia Juana is the extreme nethermost toe-nail of the Pacific Highway. Translated literally it means homely Aunt Jane, interpreted proverbially it signifies gin-dice-dirt. A bare five hundred yards out of bounds of Uncle Sam's uniforms, the sweet, orderly green world seems to have been spaded over to show

brown mud, damp stones, slippery roots and oily worms.

Tia Juana, to the large public eye in which it darkles, is perhaps no worse than Huck Finn was to the rest of the village. Huck went fishin' at Sunday-school time not because he wanted to, so much as to prove that he was not amenable to the common law. Tia Juana must be beastly tired of drinking, gambling, horse-racing, bull-fighting and dope-taking, but it is enticed along the broad and crooked path by the never-palling originality of being the licensed urchin who cavorts without the pale and holds his thumb to his nose at the good boys within. If the United States enacted a law against public singing Tia Juana would conduct a night-and-day oratorio.

"Who would ever have believed," soliloquized Et after we had watched the herds around the whisky shops and gaming places and were coming out of that respectable abomination, the Foreign Club, "that a hundred per cent of American tourists at heart are bad."

"Yes, indeed," in Dum's fine sarcastic vein, "who would ever be easy enough to believe it?"

"Well, can't you trust your eyes?"

"Huh! These people—bad? They're just humbugs—good men trying to pretend they're bad. The type isn't so dangerous as the bad man pretending he's good but it's fifty times as numerous."

Back we came quickly out of an atmosphere of

insecurity, out of range of the muddy-eyed scowling money-grabbers, and back under the friendly curling folds of the Stars and Stripes. I think it was the first time I had ever heard Et glory and luxuriate in being an American, and even the others of us smiled on the flag as an old friend.

Working against a strong moral current Clarrywards, I insisted on the next day for sight-seeing in San Diego, amongst the matchless luxuriance of Balboa Park, and its quite inimitably creepy snake-house. It was delightful holidaying, for San Diego and its cameolike little brother La Jolla are exhilarating even to the most jaded of tourists.

But the plan was nevertheless mistake number three in our quest of the gallant beau.

The date of leaving was Sunday. Along by the foamy fringe of the majestic Pacific we rolled joyfully for fifty miles. Up over the grade of the Torrey Pines, down to Oceanside and its Mission San Luis Rey, a kick to one side at Cardiff and Carlsbad but always back to where we gazed in weird fascination out across that vasty blue expanse, which, in its measureless sweep gently slays the human conception of distance and size; which is at once a dead-still streak of sleepy shimmer and a churning limitless battlefield of incalculable and cruel forces—the veriest symbol of eternity tangible to the human mind.

But the poetry of that inflexible, "Crash! Crash!" on the honeycombed drenching rocks was spoiled at

last by the maddening, nerve-racking, "Whirr-rr Whirr-r-Whirr!" of cannon-ball automobiles hurling their crazy human freight at shameless speeds. It was our first Sabbath of Southern California's motor-infested highways, and, we devoutly hoped, our last. Beyond San Juan Capistrano, and a few minutes of blessed, almost consecrated, stillness within its quaint gardened mission, terror claimed us for her own. Cats, dogs, a pig, lay slain by the roadside, barnyard fowls and even swift-flying birds littered the pavement. Ugly black tire-scrapes ending in the ditch, a collision here, a wreck there and the charred remains of a motor-truck failed to modify in the slightest degree the mad meaningless stampede. At the foot of a steep hill where a by-road joined the highway lay a little car, its steering-gear buckled like wire, its twisted bumper blood-stained.

In vain did Dum and I alternate at the wheel. Our resolution got jumpier and jumpier, until we called a halt for the night in the city of Santa Ana. Santa Monica and the long-suffering Clarry must pine in loneliness another night because, so far as continuing to Los Angeles was concerned, we were a hundred per cent shell-shock casualty.

On Monday we reached Santa Monica at noon. Clarry had left in the morning! "I tried to reach you by wire at Las Cruces," his note read, "and by letter at Hollywood and San Diego, and am now somewhat at a loss. Everybody out here tells me

what a mistake it will be not to travel back via the Canadian Rockies, so after I've had a day or two in Los Angeles, I must work gradually north towards San Francisco. Will make another try shortly to inform you of my movements, by writing to both San Diego and Santa Monica. It will be simply beastly if I miss you altogether."

To me privately the day clerk added a sophisticated nod, "I'm afraid that young man found us a trifle slow over here."

To Santa Monica, then, we were for the moment married, and a pleasant housekeeper she proved in spite of all. Again and again we visited the fascinating Camera Obscura amongst the sunlit palms that hem the edge of the tremendous cliff on Ocean Boulevard. But each day and evening we urged one another in vain to brave the cold west wind in a bathing suit.

It was in Santa Monica, too, that the world verified its reputation for being too small a place in which to turn around.

Among the arriving parties came the Figlers, Madge and Bertha of gorgeous raiment and voices like files, and dapper brother Fred wearing a two-carat diamond and twanging his way right and left into private discussions. In Boston the Figlers had cockatooed their way along the path of the lately-arrived financially by putting an aspiring shoulder to the wheel of society bazaars. Last January their

open purse had been the makings of Mrs. Dolbrook's lamp-shade stall during Hospital Week.

"Well, well, well! Of all folks to bump into 'way out in this part of the country," the trio stemmed the flow of hotel life while they held up and loudly acclaimed the self-conscious Et. "We reckoned to meet all kinds o' Boston people out here but so far we've only seen May Klein."

Meanwhile a person of another type, a personage, was inscribing on the register "Mrs. Henry Cornwallis, Leamington, England." The responsive graciousness of the hotel officials proclaimed the distinguished arrival, if her stately bearing and crown of white hair had not done so already. Mrs. Cornwallis' measured dignity as she bent over the register did not prevent her discovering the name "John Kemp Atwood". Immediately on her re-appearance she sent for Dum.

"Surely I cannot be mistaken," she looked him over with frank recognition. "You have the features and expression of my dear old friend, Leda Kemp."

"You think I have really?" Dum did not quite conceal his blush of emotion. "Young as I was, I remember my mother speaking of the Honourable Mrs. Cornwallis."

Presently he brought the Skipper and me into the conversation.

"Will your niece and her friends not join us?" asked Mrs. Cornwallis.

"I'm not sure that they are friends really," absolved the Skipper. "They are some people she has met in Boston."

"Ah! Yes," said Mrs. Cornwallis with understanding deliberateness. "But I wonder if they would care to? I am so interested in Americans and have been meeting scores of them. My husband was a tremendous admirer of Canadian and United States institutions. I know he always wanted to get away from England and settle in Canada."

The Figlers were the happiest of our party that evening. Mrs. Cornwallis employed the same confident smile in subduing them and listening to them. Dum required no subduing. He was strangely gentle all the time. A depth of memories floated—once or twice swam—in his keen grey eyes. "These are things I never knew about my mother," is all I remember his saying. Through her graciousness to all, it could not but be felt that Mrs. Cornwallis

would have preferred the evening with him alone. Et spoke little. She was having an hour alone with her reflections, particularly her memories of Victoria.

## Chapter XXIII.

## EARTHQUAKES AND SUCH

THURSDAY found us curling up through the grey mountains back of Los Angeles. The amazing Ridge Route, along which the car runs hog's-back for twenty-five miles, flanked by great depths of valley and more and more mountains, had brought us to a height of fifty-two hundred feet at Sandbergs.

We came the Ridge Route because it is the shortest road to Sacramento. The fiery cross, in the shape of Clarry's promised letter, had arrived by the early post. Our pursuer, now the pursued, was approaching San Francisco and could meet us in Sacramento if convenient. We wired back to wait until Saturday evening, and bloodhounded on the warm trail.

East from Sandbergs stretched the wide brown valley through which flows the Los Angeles aqueduct on the skirts of the Mohave Desert. Then a scoot through the Tejon Pass, one reckless break-neck downhill of twenty miles, until, a simmering vista of heat, the long flat valley of the San Joaquin lay beneath us.

An early surprise of California motoring is that sixty per cent of it is very much like crossing the prairies—on good roads.

For thirty-two miles we drove, direct as a dart, into

Bakersfield. With two days to spare, Sacramento was safe, but Fate and her handmaiden Time had already played us pranks. Fresno was another hundred and fifteen miles, but over these flat perfect roads we could make it with ease by dinner time.

The day was sultry. It was a splendid day for an earthquake.

There runs in my family (like most families) the amazing gift of recognizing the correct sort of weather for a calamity—after the calamity has calam-ed.

My indigestion of the past week was getting to my belt and my temper. It was a plain case of over-eatis induced by a plethora of California cooks. My puffiness, becoming chronic, was irritating to me; it threatened to become so to everybody else.

As the car moved steadily along the monotonous plain northward from Bakersfield that sultry noon-day I determined to contrive some sort of break in the lazy procession of over-tempting dining rooms. At home I walk a good deal, and, in days gone by, ten and twenty mile hikes were regular events. I sighed fatly at the memory.

At Tulare I gave the wheel to Dum, whereupon the motion of the car began to give me train sickness. At five o'clock we reached Selma, fifteen miles short of Fresno. I was wheezing with disgust at myself and announced my intention of walking in. Following the expected objections from my companions—ladies can always tell what not to do for indigestion

—they consented to drive on ahead and await dinner for me in Fresno. With great hopes I looked forward to footing it, in what I thought would be the cooler afternoon hours.

The country was more varied now and I did have a delightful first hour of it, but shortly afterwards began to tire. It was humiliatingly apparent that fifteen miles was a fool of a distance to have attempted. After rolling smoothly at thirty miles per hour without effort, walking at three or four with effort is worse than slow; it is about as satisfactory as an all-night dream of struggling to crawl under a cellarless house. We are told that the man who always walks will live longer, but I think it only seems longer. In spite of my winged ambition the world seemed very motionless, discouragingly heart-breakingly motionless. Weary of the sameness of it, I would determine to keep my gaze doggedly down, boring holes in the pavement with frowning eyes, in the hope of seeing something different when I looked up. After an age of this I would discover myself approaching a large barn, the same barn I had discovered myself approaching ten minutes ago.

The cool shade of a little village and a waiting motor-bus tempted me to give it up, but I put Satan and the village behind me, and walked on, hat in hand and bathed in perspiration, the product of many a walkless pig-stuffing day.

Resolving to rest, I spied two or three generous

trees in a hollow, and growing out of long grass beside what might have been a stream bed. Swishing into the little grove and preparing to drop, I was startled by the apparition of a tall man jumping up to meet me. There was an undeniably nasty look on his face, of fear or defiance—the thick horn-rimmed spectacles concealed which. The look remained frozen for five or six seconds, one hand behind him, the other in front and half raised exactly as it happened to be when he had struggled to his feet. The spectacle terrified me. I could not have said why, because, plainly, he had had no idea of my existence. He made me think of direful things, but of no direful thing in particular. My subliminal senses cried out that the man meant me harm, but he wore well-smeared overalls, a workingman's thick boots and a highly respectable bald head with wisps of long hair cultivated at one ear and swept across the shiny sea to the other.

Then he spoke and grinned (or grunted) widely, exposing the ends of a poorly made plate and some black roots behind. Again, his voice was disquieting to me, but the words were natural enough.

"Walking far, sir?"

"Into Fresno," I boasted without hesitation.

"Yeh—h!" and he paused suspiciously.

"Was feeling so rotten I sent my car on ahead. Hoped the hike would fix me up."

There must have been something sympathy-inspir-

ing about me by this time. The man's face relaxed and I knew that he believed me. At the same time he fell completely off what might have been his guard and picked up a white cap the sort I have seen worn by carpenters—and a dinner pail.

"Gee!" he said in friendly tones, "I wisht I had to walk for exercise. Do y'know what I took ye for?—a hold-up man."

"Not in broad daylight?" I laughed.

"No, I suppose there ain't any, but people has got so silly scared. I been walking these roads for three or four years and I never see one yet. Perhaps," he put in as an afterthought, "they've passed me up. A poor working man ain't their meat."

"There may not be any in daylight, or any at all around here," I joined in, thinking of Lankershim, "but people in motor cars have need to be on the watch for them."

"Yes, I'm the boy that knows it," he agreed sadly. "The auto club has sent out to everybody that they mustn't give a lift to man, woman or child. And you bet they all keep right on their way. In my case now, I bought a little bit of a place over at Oleander. I've been trying to pay for it ever since. There's the woman and the two little fellows, so I have to keep huntin' a job to help things out. Generally it's some piece away, but up till a year or so ago I could get a lift home just like you ask a fellow the time. Right now, I got something in a planing-

mill at Selma and try to get home twice a week. Believe me or not, I've had to walk these nine miles every blame time unless some delivery or truck in town happened to be coming my way. That's why it sounded real funny to me when you sent your auto on ahead—so's to get a rest walkin'."

This speech had not been offered in the way of an appeal at all, but it illustrated strikingly how a section of people may suffer when a new move is inaugurated to punish quite another section of people. I felt genuinely sorry for this man having to plod his weary miles after a hard day's work in order to reach his little place and his children.

He had sat down again with me and we spent perhaps an hour together, which was welcome enough to me at least.

"Well, sir," my friend ventured at last, "we'd best be on the move, especially you, if you're going to make Fresno. It'll be long past dark if you walk all the way and your folks may get to worrying."

I agreed, thanked him, and as we walked along I made enquiries about the little boys. One of my pet diversions at the end of a motor tour is the sending of some small reminders to children of people we have met. I try to be subtle in finding out the name, age, sex and address of the future beneficiary and the Skipper always seems to enjoy herself hugely at my scheming, saying that any but a wooden father or mother would at once see through it.

After another couple of miles I was again sparring for time and my friend of the inverted tin-cup hat suggested we sit on a bench in front of a wayside gas-station.

"Maybe this fellow'll know somebody driving in. You ain't in no fit shape to walk it, you know. You got—it must be—ten miles yet."

As my reckoning had made it considerably less than that distance the information was discouraging. The fellow at the pump did not seem very eager to recommend any escape, especially as two cars drove up just then to do business. While number one was filling, the good-natured ulstered driver of number two, after lowering his car top, strolled over to where I was sitting.

"It's been muggy to-day," he remarked with the usual pleasant civility of the well-bred American.

"Worse than that," I groaned. Then, after a moment, "I hadn't the least idea how fagging it is to walk over these hard pavements."

"You're not motoring, then?" surprised.

"Well," I snickered. "I suppose I am motoring. We've made the run down from Vancouver and are on our way home . . ." In a minute I had told him all my history and was momentarily sorry for it, as it brought the obvious offer.

"Oh, you'd better just get in with us, sir. We'll be in Fresno in a few minutes."

I glanced at his car. Another man was in front

and three ladies filled the rear seat. It looked like a full house. "Don't worry about that," smiled Mr. Crawford, as I had found his name to be, "she's a seven-seater."

Then I caught sight of my cup-hatted friend, on his way home to the kiddies. "Thanks very much indeed, Mr. Crawford, but I believe I'd rather make it, now I've started."

"Nonsense, old man. My guide book says it's six miles and it'll be dark in a few minutes."

The "six miles" sounded just like a lift of four, so I had courage to persist. "It's very good of you, but if you'll just look up my wife at the hotel and let her know I'm coming. The fact is," I whispered over bravely, as I saw my attitude influencing him, "I've got a man here that's footing it with me and—"

But I had only blundered in again. Mr. Crawford's brother-in-law had joined us and together they out-insisted me, so I called gaily to Mr. Overalls, while our new hosts slapped down the two extra seats.

What prompted it I did not know but, as the planing-mill man sat down and nodded bashfully to the ladies, I experienced again that odd sense of misgiving concerning him. After a little inward coaxing of myself, however, I attributed this merely to the embarrassment one is inclined to feel when suddenly called on to introduce people who don't fit.

"Yes," I was saying in a minute, "my friend here

is on his way to spend the week-end with his family. We've been having a great old talk this afternoon."

The man seemed excited at being the object of conversation, so it was all the more of a surprise when he suddenly made the request in a cool and confident voice, "Yes, my place is just down this here road. It's less'n a mile to where the folks wait for me. I wonder if you'd just turn in there a minute, Mr. Crawford. They'd like to see the style I get home in."

The psychology of the situation was impelling. Mr. Crawford and his brother-in-law had been heaping courtesy on me, and all of us in turn had been trying to induce my friend to talk. The fading daylight seemed no plausible reason for declining so small a request, which was natural enough in such a person. Mr. Crawford had, in fact, no time for excuses because the cross-road was reached in a few seconds. Smiling significantly, but without speaking, he turned in. It was a deserted road, narrow but quite pretty. We had not gone many hundred yards when Mr. Overalls exclaimed excitedly,

"If nobody minds I'll sit up here so I can wave to them." Then, as he got firmly and confidently seated on the folded hood, his left hand gripping the seat back, he whipped out a huge revolver,

"Hands up, everybody except the driver!" he shouted. And in that high-pitched voice which, in its rasp, somehow reminded me of the snarl of a

chimpanzee, my sleeping—and sleepy—instinct of the past two or three hours burst all at once into real brain action. "Stop this car, Crawford!" was the highwayman's next command, and uppermost in my mind, where should have been only shame and embarrassment for my part in the mess, were quick, clear, stealthy thoughts of self-congratulation that Dum and I had decided that night, ten days ago, to follow the party up to Blossom's place.

"Now, every one of youse get out—No! All on this side—and stand darn still. Face the other way! Them women had better keep their hands up."

Just before we had left the main road, in fact at the moment of my embarrassment at the cheeky request of the man I had introduced, there had passed us a sedan car, from which a man had called. My faculties now hyper-sensitized by the mental shock, it came over me that the car must have been my own and the voice Dum's.

It passed gratefully through my mind also that Dum Atwood generally knows, in an emergency, how and how quickly to move. With meekness and humility, I realized that I do not.

After a two-hour wait in Fresno, my old friend had agreed with my wife and niece that they had better drive back in the hope of meeting me. They were scrutinizing each car north-bound. My position in Mr. Crawford's car and my failure to salute them was naturally a surprise, which instantly

became suspicion when Mr. Crawford had abruptly turned into a by-path as though to escape from their sight. Et declared I had been in the middle of a crowd of men; the Skipper insisted there were women in the car.

Had the bandit not been engrossed in bullying us out to the roadside he might have seen another car slow down to a creeping pace, stop forty yards behind, then drop noiselessly backwards and off the road until it was concealed beside some low bushes.

There was no particular hurry. It requires some minutes to search six people even when standing in a row with their backs turned. In fact Dum was in time to witness as much of the operation as the gloom permitted, from his vantage point, crouched on the running board on the far side of Mr. Crawford's car.

As Blossom's friend Gates finally turned, with well-filled pockets, to possess himself of the steering-wheel of his benefactor, Dum's head doubtless bobbed below the skyline and his right hand took a new grip of the thing he had, at short notice, picked up.

I could not properly have realized the hold-up, for I distinctly recall my concern—almost my injured pride—that the man Gates was apparently treating me exactly like the others. Surely he owed me a little special attention, and assuredly he would have paid it had he held so serviceable a memory of me as I had for him.

As he took his seat in the captured car, the man

continued his verbal bullying, and threatening us not to turn around. Then, all at once, his voice was no more, concurrently with another sound. When the contact of the flat of an iron wrench with a man's skull can be heard across the road it is, I understand, safe to conclude that the man's voice will not again shortly be heard.

"All right, Joe! Quick! Give me a hand!"

The block-and-tackle rope I have carried under the back seat for ten years at last found a use. Lacking the skill to secure our victim's hands behind his back, we made a job of it by wrapping him up like a mummy.

Mrs. Crawford and the two other ladies had tearfully deposited themselves in a general scheme of drapery on the shoulder of Mr. Crawford and his brother-in-law. Mr. Crawford, himself amusingly mystified, watched our movements and listened to Dum's frequent references to our past knowledge of the still unconscious Gates.

"Are you a detective, Mr. Curlew?" he finally asked, a quaver in his voice of entire friendliness.

"No, Mr. Crawford," I blushed again in the protecting darkness, "I am the amateur champion boob of British Columbia. What I know about this Gates only came over me after you drove into this side road. So far as I was concerned, my wishing him on you was absolute accident."

Half an hour later, almost at the minute he was

solemnly handed over to the state police, Gates re-opened his eyes. He was arriving home in even greater style than he expected.

No matter how thrilling the excitement, it must eventually subside. After reviewing, comparing, speculating and re-reviewing each of this hectic evening's strange turns of fortune, the Skipper became herself again sufficiently to plague me,

"Oh, by the way, dear, have you decided what you are going to send the two dear little boys?"

## Chapter XXIV.

## ENTER MR. TRIANGLE

BY MORNING I was sick of the Gates' business. In the matter of hold-ups, people divide into three classes: those who are disturbed at the prospect, those who are very much more disturbed at the nasty reality, and those who are disturbed as an aftermath. Mrs. Crawford and her friends had cried and felt better, but I had no such relief. In the silent hours of the night I trembled and perspired, at the recurrence of the vision of myself waiting to have a ragged-edged bullet sent crashing through my brain. Far from getting any refreshing sleep, I was weakened and exhausted.

The legal formalities were accelerated for us, but there is an irreducible minimum to the demands of criminal procedure and the end of it was that we spent the whole miserable day in Fresno. Even with good luck, it would now require speed and determination to reach Sacramento in time. We could, and did, however, make the best use of an early start Saturday. Dum was elected driver with the Skipper for seat-mate. Et, although this morning evidencing some signs of hero-worship, had ensconced herself beside me and did her best to pet and coddle my still jumpy nerves into tranquillity, her thoughts and eyes

the while straining forward with every turn of the road.

Dum, of course, knew what a late arrival meant, and it was soon apparent that he did not intend failure to result from lack of effort on his part.

Through the usual underground channel I had the information—in truth it was a frequently repeated warning—that Et "was quite serious about this Mr. Wentworth." While he might not hold any interest for us, the Skipper explained, he was evidently a man of whom Doctor and Mrs. Dolbrook would approve, and this she evidently held to be very important. The prospect of Et's becoming engaged was a relief to her aunt, but with the relief I detected what I looked for, a measured sigh of regret. I gathered, in fact, that the regret was no longer a secret since the relief was in sight, for she added resignedly, "Of course, I think the world of Dum, you know."

For a hundred miles of the fruitful sweltering valley of the San Joaquin our road was on the dead level. Madera, Merced and Modesto, bright, well-ordered towns which yesterday were not, and tomorrow would be grown-up, slipped by like so many show windows.

Just north of Stockton we left the direct highway and struck off towards the Sacramento River under promise of exchanging forty miles of the now tedious sameness of cultivated fields for forty miles of the scenery of Holland. Certainly we were in the low-

lands, the altitude of Stockton being seventeen feet above sea-level and Sacramento twenty-one, but however interesting the trade, it was not a fair one in point of miles. Also, as is so likely to happen to motor wanderers from the straight and strip-map path, we encountered complications. "You simply can't miss the road," we were assured at the automobile club office, but in that respect our ability was grossly underestimated. Then, a fire broke out in a small Chinese settlement and thoroughfare was blocked for an hour. The drive along the levees of the Sacramento was a delightful novelty, if the oldest highway and trade route of modern California may be called a novelty. Down below the river level, and below sea-level, stretched the limitless orchards of delta lands, while, perched on the levees, were the residences of prosperous planters which would have amazed the venturesome Sutter who, in the Mexican regime, led up this brown and lazy stream the scanty band he had imbued with his own crazy notion that the Sacramento valley could be cultivated. True, the gold rush of after years enticed away all his men and killed his dream, but the California of to-day—the world's fruit cornucopia—immortalizes the man who died in poverty trying to bring it into being. It was not difficult to see, too, why all the "movie" scenes of the Mississippi are staged here.

Being off the main-travelled road might have been a soothing experience to me, but somehow my

agitation had crossed wires with Et's. Saturday afternoon was waning and Clarry Wentworth might have returned to San Francisco. Frightenedly she whispered to me, "We must get there. I can't disappoint him again. Don't you see—I must."

She had closed her little fingers tightly around my hand and I grinned a sneaky confidential grin to myself. It was just the right sort of secret to have from one's wife. Et was very winsome in her struggle not to appear selfish, but her coaxing was quite irresistible.

Turning back the pages of my recent chapter of memory, I wondered what would have been the humour of this girl, a few weeks ago, in face of delays which to us were exasperating and to her tragic. I could only pat her shoulder encouragingly, but, in my mind, that moment and that day will always associate themselves with my first warm flush of pride at being the uncle of Ethelfrinda Dolbrook. Probably the thought was born of the prospect of losing her, but I remember how, as she breathed her heart-breaking but good-natured distress into my ear, I swallowed hard—and swallowed hard again—before I could speak. For, all at once, I had felt a proud sense of gratitude that to us had been left the task of educating to womanhood this bewildered, untaught child.

At last Sacramento appeared across the flat landscape. At least the cupola of the State Capitol

stood out in the setting sun, and Dum, smiling a grim amusement, responded to the popular demand for speed.

At the hotel Et lifted my sleeve from the register with an air of ownership and blushingly uncovered, "Clarence A. Wentworth, Boston, Mass." As this all-important guest was not in his room and we must needs dine or starve we trooped in as we were. Clarry must shortly have preceded us, for as we settled in our niche, there he was, a few tables away, his back towards us.

Et told us, and then went suddenly speechless, motionless and nerveless.

"Would you like me to go and bring him," I offered. She nodded, but even that was a brave effort.

Carefully laying my serviette aside, I looked again towards Clarry, hesitated and sat down, with a formal, "Perhaps we had better wait a minute." I had no designs on the young man, but my consideration and delay were nevertheless by way of a nail in his coffin. Clarry's flirtation with the waitress had better have been rudely broken into, for Clarry's sake. There are various ways of speaking to a pretty waitress, but to engage her serious personal attention without betraying the fact to others is a trick which evidently was beyond Clarry's experience. His order was a long time in giving, between each item he threw back his head and gave

the girl his full ogling attention, his last behest seeming to provoke considerable whispered discussion, the waitress's red lips pursing and unpursing like a Cupid's bow. Clarry's look followed her to the door and met her again when she returned in a magically brief moment. As she laid down his soup I regretted to notice—or did I honestly regret?—that Clarry squeezed her hand, in response to which she allowed her blue-and-white uniform to touch his shoulder. Et looked up in time for the last of the pantomime. It had the effect at any rate of giving my niece a firmer hold on her faculties. A little twitching smile moved her mouth and she remarked sharply,

"Yes, that's Clarry all right!"

We changed our minds about having him over to our table. At least Et changed our minds, if we really had any on the subject.

"We'll sit here till he goes out," she asided to me. "I don't want to embarrass him about a little thing like that."

I was still inside the dining-room at the cashier's desk when Clarry's waitress was turning in his check. "I've got to get out o' here sharp at a quarter past to-night," she urged. "It's important."

"Got a date, Florrie?" purred the busy and dignified cashier who was much more observant than I would have fancied. "That rah-rah boy may have another girl in town."

"Is she?" the eyes under the beaded lashes did

more than snap. "I mean, do you know anything about it?"

With this information as it were under my hat, I opened a confidential file for Clarry, but to the Skipper I suggested,

"Better run up with Et into that little parlour near our rooms. Dum and I will have Mr. Wentworth sent along to you."

A minute or two later a faultlessly-poised beau of the Valentino period was paraded past two smoke-enveloped men whose impersonal attitude in deep arm-chairs did not prevent a comprehensive survey of his person. Clarry's general appearance suggested length. The fedora hat was shaped long rather than wide or high, the vest was long and loose, the points projecting down like a pair of scissors, in keeping with slender flowing ends of his soft collar. His brow, chin and the fingers holding his cigarette carried out the conventional fashion-plate tallness, as also the raining-in-London trousers and the English brogues. Clarry had graduated and was about to be admitted as a partner in his father's law firm, but his face was boyish, so boyish that one could not picture it ever being lined with experience. His expression was that of self-satisfied familiarity with his world and a complete lack of interest in that of other people.

From all angles, Clarry was what the girls of his set called a winner. When Dum and I were in

turn paged and sent up to join the party, Clarry was persuaded away from Et to meet us. He looked just sufficiently interested to imply that we were persons he presumably must know, and who doubtless would declare themselves "right pleased" to know him. He did it well.

"How long have you been in the West, Atwell?" he enquired. "Eighteen years! Really! How do you like it, so far away from New York and everything? Jolly expensive getting to Europe, too, isn't it?" And, after Dum had replied, "You think it's fine out here? Do you, really, eh!" Then, nodding as though to say he would discuss it later, "Huh, huh! Well, well! . . . Come along, little girl," proprietorily to Et, "I've bushels of news for you yet. The gates of civilization closed on me three weeks after your time, don't y'know, and I've got the very latest from the crowd."

On the basis of this brief apology the two slipped back into the chesterfield, Clarry allowing her an irreducible corner as he threw his arm around behind and crossed his knee in her direction to emphasize exclusive tête-à-tête and leave us an excellent view of his well-tailored back. We could hear Et fairly gurgling as she drank his words. She filled even the briefest pauses with stimulating enquiries . . . . . "And Christie, did she really leave Bob and go to Barbados?" "Does Fenton still go out to see that

music-teacher in Braintree?" "Did the Homewood-Drakes give their dance after all?"

It is said that the most gibble-gabble of book-agents or lounge-lizards comes at length to the end of his story. Et grew less and less eager to fill the pauses, and when at last Clarry was reduced to, "So you see, they're all going it as hard as ever," I sighed contentedly to perceive that he had shot away his whole cartridge-belt and barked his knuckles on the bottom of his bag of ideas.

"But is that—all?" Et laughed queerly. "Aren't they—doing anything?"

"Well!—Yes, of course. What you mean is—" Clarry looked uneasily around. "What do you say if we beat it to a show or something."

Et insisted on the rest of us coming to a show or something, but, as we came from the elevator and melted into the lobby crowd, Clarry pulled her away, although I chanced to hear, as they were disappearing, ". . . rest from this crowd? Bit stodgy! Shall we give 'em the slip, eh, what?"

I made a second note in my confidential file and we did not attempt to overtake the runaways.

The Skipper and Dum had seen the advertisement of a lantern lecture on the wild animals of California, and its sober educational value fitted in well with our humour. Et had been a capricious, rebellious child—but her sudden absence nevertheless brought the hunger and longing people have for a capricious

and rebellious child. With Et, had departed our problem, the very yeast of the party; our movements were no longer an exciting puzzle. It was clear that, until we got used to being without her, we would be, even as Clarry had accused, a "bit stodgy."

"Oh, my poor aching sides," Et laughed and panted when, about midnight in a corner of the main rotunda, she found us, each with a library book. "Clarry is so droll. I've laughed all night." Her flushed face and sparkling eyes, combined with a humour very obviously overdone, left us to suspect that she had not laughed quite all the night. "He never sees a thing but the ridiculous side of people, not another thing, and—Oh, by the way, auntie, I've told him we'd be here all day to-morrow. That's all right, isn't it?"

"That will be all right, Et," I interjected. "But I think we should get away the first thing Monday morning."

"My! I wish we had room for Clarry. He's such fun."

"Well, if we're ever going to get to bed," evaded the Skipper. "I guess the elevator man's gone to sleep. Come on, we've got to walk it."

It was five flights. Et and I trudged behind. As she leaned on my arm, tired but of good cheer, I asked,

"I suppose you've had a regular night on Back Bay, little fellow?"

"Yes," more wearily than I expected, "It's queer though, they do the same things there all the time and seem to be satisfied with it. Mother's got 'nerves' again and had to give up teas and bridge for a while."

"You'll have a great old grist of real adventures to tell them when you get back."

"When I—". She opened her inviting lips and big surprised eyes almost in consternation. "When I—get back! Yes, I suppose I will." She laughed and pinched my arm. "It must be your engaging hospitality, old dear, but somehow I'd never given a thought to getting back. Not even when Clarry talked so much about—" We were at the last landing and she dragged me to a window overlooking Sacramento's heaping trees, with the dark mass of the Capitol dome behind, in odd contrast to the intermittent ringing noise of the street below. "Out there," she raised her small arm dramatically, "I've seen San Francisco the great and only. Down there," she swung her finger southward, "the Hollywood I might have known, and there," she turned me around to follow her pointing as though I were a little boy, "I've got the great wild Rockies still to know."

Et stopped and murmured absently a minute, then, "Isn't it funny. The one thing I had quite forgotten was the idea of ever going back home."

I made a third note in my confidential file.

## Chapter XXV.

## ENFORCED LEISURE

"I'M NOT so sure I'd like to see a daughter of mine marry Mr. Wentworth," the Skipper confided to me the first thing in the morning, "but he's Et's kind, and she's crazy about him —and, one thing," again that washing-hands sign, "her parents can't blame me."

It might have been a good time to disclose my confidential file, but I wanted to be sure Et was not a madcap who, to-morrow, would decide she wanted to take the train East with Clarry. My silence discouraged the Skipper, so that the incident was an end to sympathy-seeking.

After breakfast Clarry took Et away in my car; after lunch he did the same. Et made formal efforts to include others of us, but at these moments Clarry was always busy flicking away ashes and watching the operation with downcast eyes that expressed bored patience.

The Skipper divided her day between fitful reading and thoughtful window-gazing. Dum we really envied, for he had a large batch of forwarded letters to answer.

While we were finishing dinner, Et again remarked that Clarry also was travelling north and that he intended to join us again at Portland.

"Huh, huh!" Clarry smiled artfully, "the old man told me to take in what there was to see on the coast, and I might as well go back through Canada as any other way."

Early in the day Dum had tried to out-insist me that he would go by train as far as Portland to make room for Clarry in the car, but I had silenced him. To silence Dum when he is in earnest is no mean accomplishment; my ownership of the car may have been a contributing factor.

"Well, come along, Ettie m'dear!" Clarry took her arm with an unexplained burst of smiling attention and half lifted her from her seat, "This is our last couple of hours."

Et made two attempts to stop and discuss the matter with us, but her escort succeeded in drawing her along. Just as they were disappearing she turned and looked appealingly back. Her face was an amused apology for the act and was our first hopeful moment of the day.

"Did Clarry ask you for the car?" the Skipper enquired sharply.

There had possessed me at the same moment the odd whim to have Clarry as a companion for a week,

just in order to ascertain the exact limit to which the thoughtlessness of youth could be carried.

"Oh, probably he thinks my offer this morning is good enough," I excused him.

Et's room was en suite with our own, as in fact we had usually managed to arrange it. About eleven o'clock my wife stood up impatiently.

"It's time Et was here. We should all be in bed early to-night." Then, as she started for the other room, "I wonder if you'd go down and see if they're in the lobby, while I'm taking down my hair at the mirror?"

After a few moments I laid aside my reading and reached for my hat, but as I touched the door-knob, I became aware of an insistent feminine whispering a few inches distant.

"You heard me! I said—go away!" . . . "Yes, I know I did let you kiss me last night, but I don't choose to do so to-night." . . . "I can't tell you why." . . . "What! Clarry Wentworth! After I've told you you mustn't? Do you want me to make a scene? Mr. Atwood would be at least gentleman enough to respect my feelings."

By the time I had stamped warningly across the room and back again, Et had turned the knob and was standing in the open doorway, alone.

"Hel-lo, uncle Joe!" she greeted affectionately as she ran to me quickly and planted a little puff of a kiss on my cheek. "I've been a little bit lonesome for you and auntie."

"I'm glad you're here, Et. Your aunt thinks we should all go to bed if we're to have an early start." I spoke carelessly just as though the final entry were not being made in my confidential file.

## Chapter XXVI.

## FROM THE RIDICULOUS TO THE DISASTROUS

MY CONFIDENTIAL notes and our seven o'clock start was excuse for the non-appearance of Clarry.

In our search for scenic adventure, we had chosen the west bank of the Sacramento for our return to Redding, so we turned north at Davis. The alliterative run through Woodlands, Williams and Willows, however, borrows its reputation on the general rule that all motoring in California is delightful, for in truth the road of W's is largely fields and mile-posts. The flat sameness of it was not improved by a drizzling rain, which rendered the wind-shield semi-opaque and brought consolation only in history repeated from our childhood when parents philosophically reminded us that it was "good for the crops." At one point we were insulted by having to negotiate an unpaved section of two or three miles.

The unpaved patch it was which unleashed our gay spirits. Life is a series of waves called optimism and on the crest of one such we were fully astride this morning, the more childishly joyful by contrast with yesterday's trough of pessimism. Dum and I probably wanted to cheer as the lordly Clarry receded farther and farther into the small end of the

telescope. To us Portland and its possibilities were a long way off.

Our exuberance of spirits had been corked down only by fear that Et might question our taste.

"Speak up, sister!" I called to her close-lipped vision in the rear-view mirror, "Why don't you try smiling?"

"Well, if you've got to know," she burst out laughing, "Every time I open my mouth to smile you and Mr. Atwood can see me in that wretched mirror with four rows of teeth. If you'll tell the miserable car to stop its vibrating, I'll smile all day."

Approaching a town we slowed down to read its framed introduction in the "History of the United States" series of advertising signs, "LAMPWICK, 4 MILES FROM HERE. ON THE SLOPES TO THE WEST GROW ABUNDANCE OF SHASTA DAISIES."

"Well, they just had to have a sign at this turn," solved the Skipper, "and, as there was probably nothing interesting to tell about the town, they proceeded to tell about its weeds."

As we pulled up in Lampwick—a veritable Toonerville Trolley municipality with scarcely a soul in sight—we were confronted with the sign, "Parking Limit, 40 minutes."

"I guess it refers to the record stop of a tourist in Toonerville," observed Dum.

We drove into a garage for a brake adjustment, and, as we were stepping into the car again, we noticed

a for sale sign, "Buick Touring, Won't Last Long at $200."

"I don't suppose it will," chortled the irrepressible Dum. "About a week, I'd say."

"Look here, man!" Et piped in mock impatience. "You're rather a jolly dog to-day, aren't you?"

" 'A jolly dog?' " I corrected. "Dum's a jolly pack of hounds to-day for some reason."

At Red Bluff we re-joined our southbound road of a few weeks ago and reached Redding between three and four o'clock. This was to have been the day's run, but four or five hours of daylight remained and our energy was so inexhaustible that we decided to push on through the pass to Sisson or the next good hotel. Even the prospect of sixty miles unpaved and an uphill of three thousand feet failed to quench our spirits, and we sailed down the long hill to our first crossing of the Sacramento river, just as though a mountain pass was as welcome as five o'clock tea.

Dum was driving, but decidedly it was as much my fault for allowing him to take a wrong turning. When one's road lies in a narrow defile of the mountains the problem of keeping on it seems negligible, and carelessness may easily creep in.

Both of us thought that the landmarks were unfamiliar. The road had narrowed unaccountably. The absence of traffic was very noticeable and there were short steep pitches of grade not permitted by the State of California on its main highways. We

were getting farther and farther away from our route but road-signs were lacking; nobody appeared from whom to make enquiries. For long after our decision to turn back, it was in fact impossible on a road carved out of the hillsides and separating a high clay wall from a steep declivity to a creek bed. To be lost is always terrifying to the feminine mind, so we had made no sign as to the facts. But when a sudden abrupt rise forced the car into intermediate and then into low, the Skipper called in alarm.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm afraid we've taken a wrong road somewhere," it seemed wise to admit, and the brief warning was opportune because, almost the next moment, things began to happen.

Along the short flat stretch at the top of that vicious hill trotted a pair of heavy horses drawing the old-fashioned vehicle known as a democrat. On the front seat was a man driving, and a woman with a year-old child in her arms, on the rear seat three women. Surely such outfits belonged to the last generation, but there it was, a romantic picture in its wild mountain settting.

The next instant the horses were struggling to escape, turning, fouling one another and plunging.

It was the most desperate plight that could well have befallen. The road was far above a hidden stream. For about thirty feet below us the yellow clay had found what engineers call an angle of repose,

a slide, up through which stuck a few slender leafless trunks of buried trees. No green thing grew on the slide owing to the frequency with which dirt and stones rolled down it. Below this thirty feet the descent fell away in a sort of cliff, with bushes and boulders. It was one of those places down which children like to roll a stone and then stop and listen while it rattles and thumps to the bottom.

Certainly, as our car thundered up over the lip and bore down upon those horses we must have appeared to them an engine of swift destruction.

As Dum applied the newly-adjusted brakes we skidded nastily on the scanty road, but the circumstance was lost in our horror as we watched the terrified horses, in a series of sickening jerks, back the democrat steadily off the grade until it tilted at a fearful angle with three wheels on the slide. The driver lashed the animals in his endeavour to force them forward, but his vehemence seemed only to stampede them the more.

In a few seconds Dum and I were alongside and pulled the four women to safety. Next moment came the most amazing development of all. The rear axle of the democrat had stuck fast against one of the protruding stumps and as the horses struggled at the pole they got their hind legs down off the road, raised their fore hoofs in air, swayed there a second and then actually fell backwards over the jammed vehicle. Down the hill plunging and kicking at their harness

went the horses. The yelling driver, still clutching the reins, was dragged after. As they all disappeared over the yellow clay our hearts stood still, waiting for the end. But the animals evidently found some obstacle or entangling bushes, momentarily breaking their fall. The leather reins had caught around another short end of tree. We saw these tighten and pull down into the clay as though supporting man at one end and horses at the other.

All this occurred in an incredibly short time, then one of the women cried out, "The baby! Oh, my baby!"

The mother had believed that somebody had taken the infant when she was dragged to safety, but the little creature was still there on the front seat. It was likely at any moment to tumble off into the body of the vehicle or out and down the hill to its death. To attempt to reach the child looked like suicide.

Before anybody could more than cry out, Dum sprang back to our car, ripped off the canvas straps holding two suit-cases to the running board and was back again, linking the two straps into one as he came, and swearing in that profuse way that spreads confidence in a panic.

Alone, pale as chalk but courageous as a lion, Et stood erect on the edge till we saw the frantic mother prepare to jump for the democrat. Then Et caught at her, "Don't do that; you'll only be killed.

Don't you see that he's got a plan," indicating Dum, "to save the child."

"What? What's he going to do?"

"Wait just a moment," forcibly restraining the mother. "I tell you he'll get the baby if anybody in the world can."

"Here!" imperatively from Dum, "Stand right where you are, Et, and hold on to this. Joe, you take that end and get farther back there where you can brace your feet in the rut." He had buckled his end of the strap around his wrist. "Now, don't let me down too fast."

Slipping badly on the surface of the slide he reached the suspended democrat, grabbed the baby unceremoniously by its clothes and jerked his head for us to pull.

As the mother seized her child, I noticed how the buckle had cut Dum's wrist, but nobody remarked it just then.

"Look here! For God's sake," came from the invisible driver who had waited bravely until the baby was safe, "before these horses choke to death or kill me trying to get loose."

Dum, Et and I got closer to him by running a little way down the road and wading through some low bushes. Man and beasts hung close together on a veritable wall, grotesquesly suspended by the peg above. The horses had kicked away the few little bushes around them, and were now only kept from

rolling on by the reins and harness around their necks. It seemed incredible how the slender lines could hold them on the desperate incline or why the now deeply-imbedded leather straps did not draw the man up and let the animals down.

"Can you think of anything to do?" roared Dum.

"Somebody's got to cut those lines," shouted the man. His paralyzed arm carried bloody scratches. He was covered with mud, and his voice was getting weak. Clearly he had not the strength to release his arm from the reins.

"That'll only send you down to the bottom," answered Dum.

"I got to take chances," and the driver winced with pain.

A quick survey told me that cutting the lines was the one thing it was possible for us to do. Under the lip of the cliff there were good hand-holds or toe-holds to within a few feet of them. I would probably have to jump that two or three feet, but it could be done. With more time or a longer rope, it would doubtless have been easier and safer, but it was an occasion for action, immediate action. I was the captain of the ship and the danger point is the captain's post. I opened the heavy jack-knife I use on the car.

"You get back out of that!" Dum's voice was the voice of a tyrant. "I'm going out to cut that thing."

"Good heavens, man, can't you see that it's ten to one you'll go spinning down there along with them."

"It's none of your business how I'm going to do it. Get out of the way!"

He was smiling with grim unconcern the next moment as he crept out from safety.

I stepped over to where Et was.

"He's a brave man—wonderful!" she whispered once or twice, her breath coming shortly.

We saw Dum hesitate a second at the end of his footing, but there was nothing else for it. He jumped and caught the reins. It is a difficult feat for an untrained man to suspend himself with one hand, but he finally came to a stop a yard or so lower down and, with more difficulty than would be supposed, he cut the lines.

We saw the driver and Dum start downward a brief second before the horses. The men clutched at twigs and rocks as they went, so that, to our momentary relief, the falling horses gained in speed and were ahead. Then horses and men disappeared in the brush and foliage and we could only stand like petrified things and listen to the crashes and thumps and wait for it all to be over with.

"Come," I said the first moment of silence, "we've got to get down there somehow."

"I can't, uncle Joe, I can't!" wailed Et. The tears trickled over her face at last. She was all but beaten. And she had been so calm and dauntless.

Just then there came to me a sound I will always be hearing. It was a very weak sound that came up to us, but clear and blessedly welcome.

"Hel-lo! Joe!"

Then Et was completely beaten. The Skipper and one of the women from the democrat had come, so I scrambled away to an easier part of the hill with another of the women, until we found a way to the bottom.

The driver was up and trying to steady his gasping horses, also on their feet, to my amazement. Plainly Dum had got the worst of it. His right cheek had a cut which was bleeding steadily, his hands were horribly scratched and he was a bit dazed. I got some water on a handkercihef to bathe his wounds and then felt him over for possible broken bones.

After a while I heard the others making their way down and the Skipper emerged from the bushes followed by Et. I looked around cautiously and expectantly, for by this time I had enough interest in life to wonder what would happen.

The Skipper, breathless from exertion, put her arms on Dum's shoulders and patted his head with endearing congratulatory exclamations, but Et stood back and stared, biting her lip nervously. She seemed to be afraid of him. After a time, and apparently with great effort, she managed to whisper,

"We wondered if we'd ever see you again."

## Chapter XXVII.

## THE LAMPLIGHT IN THE GLADE

EARLY DUSK of evening found us all sitting on the queer tottering porch of the home-made domicile of Jamie Macfarlane, a crude solitary shack in a sombre glade of the low Sierras.

The driver of the democrat had skilfully retrieved and wired together his wrecked equipage, scoffed at his bruises and resolutely marched away after directing us to Jamie's place, our nearest and only refuge for the night. The Skipper had thought it well to prepare Et.

"The person you will meet as Mrs. Macfarlane is an Indian woman, and not really his wife," she explained. "The pioneers probably never saw a white woman for a year at a time, but that didn't kill the elemental family instinct in them, so, often, one made a home with an Indian girl. The reason he did not marry her was probably that marriage meant so little to the squaw. From what I've heard the unions lasted longer than the average American marriage of to-day."

"Mrs. Macfarlane" was old and wrinkled, enormous and unsightly at the waist. She met us with a leathery grin of welcome, uttered a gurgling sound, but no word. Jamie, huge, bearded, grey-headed, and almost kingly in a sort of Old Covenanter dignity,

smoked and talked of many things. The woman shuffled silently about, and seemed so unrelated to him, so detached from the ways of his fathers, that one was filled with philosophic speculation.

"What ever brought them together?" whispered the Skipper, and "What ever makes him stay here?" added Et.

Very soon I knew.

Jamie talked of the strange extent of his wanderings, blazing up now and then in fervent reference to his great friendships. But all his friendships had passed, he was grimly alone in the world, and behind his failure to tell more of the old friends, there was something which invited, but at the same time forbade, enquiry. His measured sentences must be in his own good season.

"Where were you living at that time?" I interposed at a point where it seemed that interest should be shown.

"Is it a concern of thine, man?" with a sudden and shocking anger. "If y'are no content wi' my account o' mysel', or wi' my surroundings here. . . ."

That was the explanation. Jamie had a hot ungovernable temper, a cast iron narrow-minded will. The squaw never interrupted or contradicted, never questioned or rebelled; she was his natural mate.

Ensconced in the one comfortable chair, the poor bruised Dum smiled, but squirmed if unconsciously he stirred. When I had removed his clothes, I found

many purple marks. The Skipper's special care was the cut on his cheek. The wrist, lacerated from the strap-buckle, badly needed attention, but, after the manner of the male patient, he refused to have it touched, insisting, "Oh, that'll cure itself."

Jamie's house consisted of a lean-to kitchen, bedroom and general purposes room in which were rugs and furs that would have made a pile a yard high. Dum and I could sleep in our car which would easily convert into a Pullman berth. Et and the Skipper would have the bedroom, leaving the Indian woman a couch of furs.

"But I'm afraid it's imposing a hardship on you, Mr. Macfarlane, to allow you to sleep in your stable," sympathized Et with a sweetness the old man did not try to resist.

"Y'are very kind, my girl, but—" he smiled sheepishly. "Ah! take your talk along wi' ye," he waved his gnarled hand. "Hoo d'ye suppose we've lived in northern California these last fifty or sixty years? About this time o' year—lang about 1870 say—I used to be living up at the head of the pass in one or other of the old taverns. One morning I'd saddle my horse and, wi' rifle and blanket-pack, I'd gang out o' town saying, 'Have an eye for me aboot this time next year.' Then, aboot the next spring, I'd hit back wi' a new Nebuchadnezzar beard and a pile o' pelts worth six months keep and a fresh stake. Afore lumberin' and fencin' and such, this country was easy

to get about. No underbrush then—you could drive a horse and buggy from one valley to the next. Why, Pete Blood and me and a couple o' Mexicans have brought five hundred head o' cattle from down below right up to the Willamette valley in Oregon. To-day, sir, five hundred men could na' hardly drive a dozen cattle through this pass or the Siskiyous unless they were wantin' to keep fair to the roads. I'll tell you, too, in the mining days when young Joaquin Miller—"

"Did you know Joaquin Miller?" eagerly from Et.

Jamie's eyes flashed again at the interruption, but he managed to calm himself. "Know him? I'm no bent on admitting it." The old man nodded reminiscently a minute. "Miller, you should ken, was no too particular of his associations. I attended a horse-stealing trial at Redding—" Jamie did not finish and nobody was brave enough to ask him to go on.

By nine o'clock the atmosphere at Jamie's place was begirt with full midnight. After preparing the car, I went to help Dum over to it. The abrasions on his wrist had hardened in a raw and ugly wound.

"Et," I drew her aside, "that wrist should be bathed. I'll light a stick or two under the kettle and then you see what you can do."

The Skipper and I walked down the road a little way. We stopped in a pool of starlight here and there when the glade opened momentarily to the startling

brightness of heaven. The heat of the day had not entirely gone, and night, under such conditions, was an enthralling, hushing, almost overpowering thing, weird in its vastness.

Feeling for Jamie's gate again, we stopped short as we saw Et come out of the cabin. In one hand she carried a lamp, in the other a pan of warm water. Before a sentence could have been uttered she had sunk to the floor by Dum's chair. She spoke up into his face an instant and then we saw the injured wrist held obediently over the water which she dripped from the sponge over the clotted sore. In another minute she was drawing the sponge across the wound itself, talking to the patient as she worked, though the words did not reach us. Et's hair was hanging over her shoulders, parted at the forehead and tied at the neck and opening like a fan down to her waist, her sleeves were rolled up above her elbows, and the little moving hands close to the lamp threw huge shadows across Dum's face and into the trees beyond.

Presently she lifted his arm into her lap and was applying the bandage, passing the roll from right to left and under and up and over again and again, singing softly the while.

The song fell away at the same moment the bandage was complete and, while the little nurse felt about for the scissors, we saw Dum lay his hand restrainedly on her head.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help—"

The attention of all of us was caught by a heavy Highland voice from inside the little house. In the dark silence of the forest the effect was startling.

"—My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber . . ." And so Jamie rolled out the lines of the psalm. Dum had turned to bring Et immediately in front of him. She sat very quietly as his hand slipped down to her arm. I thought I saw her allow her shoulder to settle resignedly against the invalid's knee as the solemn voice of the Presbyterian strode impressively through the last verse.

"The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore."

"Reading evening prayers to the squaw!" I chuckled in an unconscious recurrence of that emotional cowardice we had felt in Eugene. "I wonder if he's showing off for the company."

"Joe!" The Skipper's voice was shocked. "I should think that the fact of his 'reading' in the pitch dark is an answer to that."

Then, as though she might have been too severe on me, she confided, "Don't you think, dear, that it's really about time Et was told of Dum's matrimonial affairs?"

I saw Et, as though in a sudden awakening, pull away her hand, quickly pick up the lamp and hurry away. For a full minute fancies came and went in my brain. Carefully weighing one question against another, I answered slowly,

"Perhaps we'll be just as well, for a little longer at least, to observe that excellent advice, 'When in doubt, mind your own business.' "

## Chapter XXVIII.

### "VOCAL, INSTRUMENTAL—"

I DISCOVERED that our pullman berth was no more comfortable for two people than is a real pullman berth. When at last the wound-weary Dum dozed off I decided to give him more room to turn over; so I reversed one of the front seats and climbed over into it, trying to read by the dashlight. My best company through the strange silent hours was the minute hand of my watch which, in its creeping paralysis, painfully but inexorably dragged out the dark ages.

Shortly after three, shutting off the light to rest my eyes, I looked up between the points of the trees and the first pale gleam of gray had come to dim the lesser stars. Yawningly I watched it, while an odd disturbing sensation grew upon me. It was the feeling that my waking consciousness was not alone. Indoors, this sensation has brought cold dew to my brow but here in the silent chill of the glade it brought only a slow realization of pleasure. Turning, I saw a figure dressed in light colour emerge from the cabin door and come across to me. Hastily as my stiffness permitted, but stealthily, I opened the car door and stepped out to meet her.

"How's he now?" she whispered.

"Fine! Sleeping just dandy," I yawned. "What —you get up for?"

"Our bed—Huh ha!—bit bumpy. Thought might as well let auntie have a real sleep rest of night. Hum, haw! How long before morning?"

"About fifteen or twenty minutes, I guess," indicating the welcome paling gray through the trees. "Huh, ho! Want to go up on hill somewhere and watch"—enormous yawn—"first peep of day?"

"All right!" sleepily, then eagerly, "If I can wash the cobwebs out of my eyes first."

"That flat rock down in the brook there. Jamie told me it was the bathroom and boudoir."

"A'right! Heigh ho! 'Scuse me minute." Then as she returned and trotted off along the road with me, "This sort of thing'd be all right for a wild-nature poet, I suppose."

"Isn't it all right for you?" I must have sounded injured.

"Yes—it is, at that," laughingly. "I'm perfectly happy."

It was quite a climb, but the result was good. The mountains looked bigger in the doubtful light as the broken horizon went on clearing and colouring—gloom, gray, silver and gold. We had plenty of time to talk, but were silent mostly.

"What a strange, many-sided, unknown world it is, after all," Et murmured presently, "to ignorant little gold-fish-bowl persons like me. In narrow-

ribbed Boston I must not make acquaintances of divorced people, nor acknowledge introductions to undesirable men, nor stay out late without a chaperon. And," she pondered a moment, "I suppose they're right, too. But here in the West, with society still in the melting pot and nature overawing us, the book of forms hasn't come yet. Life is fine without it. I start out a-gypsying with people; I run away, by boat, for all night with a mysterious young man—I'm sure there is something mysterious about him, even if you haven't told me—I'm all at once night nurse in a country cabin; I get mixed up with bandits; get lost in unknown mountains and visit with husband and wife that haven't been married to each other; and then slink off with you in the middle of the night to watch the sun get up. And yet everything's all right! I never felt so right in my life. Out here there seems nobody to whisper vileness, no proper people and no undesirable people, just men and women who do things and dare things without wondering who's looking. I love it!"

We stayed a very long time, enraptured by sight of the crimson shafts striking one peak after another. On our way back to Jamie's we met Dum, who halted his painful limping when he saw us.

"Mrs. Curlew didn't know where you'd gone." In his solicitation he blushed like a lad. "She said she knew you were all right," his eyes were speaking

to Et, "but I wasn't sure." He was perspiring from the pain of walking so fast, and we each offered him a shoulder to get back.

"It will have to be a short day to-day," called the Skipper when we had got away.

The fact was that a blanket of five hours' sleep would have covered the crowd of us during the past day and a half. The Skipper had dreamed that we were driving along the mountain sky-line, the car jumping from peak to peak like a tiddledy-wink, and Et reported spending much the same kind of night riding a pogo-stick. Dum had been rolling around on his bruises. He tried to be cheerful but, unobserved, looked about as good-natured as a bull with a board over his eyes.

"Might as well decide right here," I told them, "that we must go slowly till we're rested up. I'm not going to risk spoiling our holiday again for anybody."

But after a good mid-day meal at Dunsmuir we ambled along by the feet of lordly Mount Shasta to another small town, where we decided to end the day, feeling suddenly refreshed and vigourous again. Even Dum's stiffening pains had been loosened up somehow by the drive. He said he was eager for action, so, after the usual afternoon's forty winks, we were all sitting up and with a weather eye alert on the town's

activities. It was the wounded hero himself who saw it first, a large poster in green type on the wall of the Post Office!

THE EVENT OF THE SEASON

FIRST BAPTIST Y.P.A.

COME AND REALIZE
THAT OUR OWN ARTISTS ARE THE
PEER OF ANY

7.00 Sharp.

*Adults, 35¢.* *Under 14, 20¢.*

*Children in Arms Free*

VOCAL INSTRUMENTAL
AND DRAMATIC

We made our appearance at five minutes after seven sharp amid a bubble of uncorked excitement. In the middle of a drowned-out musical prelude, the

house lights went off and a tiny row of unshaded stage lights beamed up.

"Hurrah! The new footlights!" "Get onto them footlights!" the information was passed from seat to seat, and admiring attention turned on a smiling young man near us. "You done a fine job on them footlights, Barney," somebody whispered.

Stepping out on to the table in front of the new lights, the minister, like a black ghost, raised his hand for order and said he was pleased to see so many here. Instantly we noticed the minister's bow legs. For a few seconds the restive small boys endured the irksome delay, then began to nudge one another as the ludicrous shadow effect of the speaker's movements caught their attention. The new lights, shining between the bow legs cast a huge dark arch over the audience, while his upper body shadowed the whole ceiling, giving a very passable gorilla effect with the funny little saucer of a head on huge massive shoulders. His hands appeared like bushel baskets up near the roof at the back of the building, and when he waved his arms the young fry cheered to see great ghostly shadow bogies run up and down the walls. The tumult grew from a murmur to a roar and the highly unpopular speech threatened to become the hit of the evening, until some humourless person turned on the house lights again.

"Thank you, brother Merkley, I can see you all better now," chirped the minister, who quite failed to

realize that his duty was to entertain, not to be entertained.

"First we'll hear Miss Flossie Wessler in a pianoforte solo," were his next words to get a hearing, and Flossie, looking very prim and sallow, bobbed up from nowhere and commenced with inconceivable suddenness a solo very reminiscent of "Lucy Long" except that Lucy, as I recall her, was only five minutes long, whereas Flossie's interpretation was either extended or repeated, it was hard to tell which. Not wishing to offend the artist we clapped when she rushed to centre stage, dabbed affrightedly at the audience and stalked off like an ostrich. However, as we studied our typewritten program for her successor, we were struck by a familiar sound and looked up to find Flossie again rendering "Lucy Long", and it was quite amazing how much longer Lucy had grown in the short time.

With her final disposition the chairman announced, "A bevy of talent in a polylogue entitled, 'The Ambitions of Youth'."

A galloping intermezzo by the three-piece orchestra suddenly chopped its own tail off, the curtains parted and there was a moment of death-defying silence. Then a very thin-legged and shorter-skirted nine-year-old with studied inspiration freezing her features, floated from the wings with a palette in one hand and a long thin brush in the other with which

she sketched on the empty air a masterpiece in oils, and whispered that

*" 'A' is for artist, which I'll be."*

Long before the applause had subsided, and as though eager to get in on it, came a little man wearing a huge bow tie and a pair of pancakes for ears, grinning like a painted clown and who announced in stentorian tones,

*"When—I—am—a—man,*
*I'llbeablacksmithif — I can!"*

Numbers "C", "D" and "E" were largely lost on our sluggish minds for, during their performance, we were still enjoying the pancake ears of Master "B".

"F" was a fireman with a real fireman's hat, for which reason alone he would have been a hit even if the paper wadding had not slipped out and dropped the helmet down over the little boy's chin.

Along about "K" "The Ambitions of Youth" stopped. The alphabet, of course, ran bravely on, but the supply of little boys and girls petered out, which was just as well, otherwise Et and the Skipper would shortly have been asked to leave the hall.

The minister shared our glee. He was brushing the tears from his eyes instead of attending to his announcements. "Well, what have we now," he resumed in easy conversational style, putting away his laughter regretfully as he reached for his type-

written list, "I see there's a perfect feast of fat things coming."

Unfortunately for his easy fluency, the next item was a vocal duet by Mrs. Spibey and Mrs. Walton, who were just taking their stage place immediately behind the minister, and both of them were decidedly "fat things." In response to a sly warning from his wife in the front row, the minister hurriedly glanced around, fairly yelped in consternation and then added, with a sickly wreath of smiles that, of course, there was nothing personal in his remark, at which Mrs. Spibey smiled graciously, which was about all she could do—just then.

"O-o—p!" suddenly exploded Et, clapping a hand over her mouth to suppress inspired merriment as she pointed with hysterical agitation to the concluding number on the bill, the dramatic offering which was to round off the brilliant evening, "PERCIVAL'S WOOING OF ESMERALDA."

"Know it?" she answered the Skipper's whisper, "Will I ever, ever forget it? I played Esmeralda when I was fifteen. I know every line of it." As though to prove her boast, she dashed off into an undertoned ripple,

> *"Oh, Percival, lord of my dreams*
> *Thou supremest, divinest of lovers."*

As the various elocutionists and singers appeared the Skipper invented the game of "Locating the

Mother," at which she claimed ninety per cent of successes.

"Look!" she pointed, as Ruth Beauclaire began an oration called "The Burial of Moses," "see *that* woman over there, her face craned into the row ahead and her lips forming every word and her eyes popping?"

"Pardon me," in a sweet cultured voice from the chair immediately at my elbow. "I'm intensely interested in your system." We were flattered. Our smiles invited her to go on. "But," with friendly amusement, "the woman you're watching is the mother of the little girl who recited that selection last year. I am Ruth Beauclaire's mother."

"Oh, thank you for telling us," laughed Et. "My aunt, Mrs. Curlew, might have gone on basely deceiving us all night."

"You're going to enjoy the dramatic sketch, aren't you?" Mrs. Beauclaire enquired knowingly. "I quite envy you. The piece is new to us."

When we were well into the second part of the programme, the minister was abruptly called behind the curtains. When he reappeared, the weight of a sad message clouded his brow. It was plain that something ominous was afoot.

"My dear friends," he began in deepest funereal tones of dread portent, "my dear friends, I'm afraid we're all going to be tremendously disappointed. The play 'Percival's Wooing of Esmeralda' has been faithfully and splendidly prepared and rehearsed, but

unfortunately—most regrettably it is superfluous to say—Miss Katie Green, who was to have taken the part of Esmeralda has become indisposed and had to be taken home, so—"

Mrs. Beauclaire had risen, and was walking rapidly up the aisle. Our eyes followed her while each one of us tried to smile through a sickly fear, which, however, was much too absurd to mention. Glad of any sort of interruption, the minister hopped down from his perch, and tried to hear what Mrs. Beauclaire had to say, in which laudable endeavour the audience to a man joined him. The two spoke hurriedly together a quarter of a minute, and the minister, without being so rude as actually to turn his head, glinted with horrible significance into our row, and was met by four faces in a last dismayed effort to seem unconcerned.

But the minister had sprung to the rostrum again, his features now relieved and gay. An irrepressible murmur came from the crowded hall, then silence so intense that it was nerve-trying.

"A Moses has risen up!" declared the minister. "The fact that it is a female Moses has no less saved the day. Katie has an understudy. In fact, as this kind volunteer has a wide dramatic experience, we may well call her an overstudy. This lady, Miss Dolbrook, a visitor who arrived in town this very evening, is thoroughly familiar with the part of Esmeralda, so the play will go on."

Under the clamour of applause a gruff chuckling voice poured into my ear, "Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!" Dum's reasoning was nimble enough to realize the inevitableness of going through with the thing. To do it might mean temporary embarrassment, but to refuse would mean lasting ridicule and regret. He knew Et better than I did.

"Come on, Horatious!" I abetted him, and promptly won from ny niece a look of bottled revenge.

"You simply can't get out of it, dearest," coaxed the Skipper. "I know exactly how you feel, but—"

"You don't! You don't know how I feel at all," Et withered this supreme treachery. But our desertion had stung her into daring; her tone was firm and confident all at once. Without knowing exactly how it happened she had fallen back on the native poise and dignity that had once made a schoolgirl success of Esmeralda. She stood up and got into the aisle. Underneath the smile of acknowledgment of the fresh outburst of welcome, Et bestowed on us a stealthy gleam of promised retribution. The boy who stood on the burning deck was at home amongst friends compared to our niece as she mounted to the stage door.

## Chapter XXIX.

## "—AND DRAMATIC"

THE ORCHESTRA began a lonesome romantic prelude which gave up the ghost in a last languishing whine as the cotton curtains parted from the centre on their wires to disclose the fair Esmeralda in her bower in the great castle.

*"Must I, the daughter of a king,*
*Wear out my life in hopeless wait."*

she began and the audience hugged itself in satisfaction.

One thing must be said for Esmeralda's bower: it was well furnished. It was so well furnished that one hoped there would be few actors to fight for the remnant of space left in the eight by ten foot enclosure. The tapestried walls were a suitable oatmeal paper, though they flapped against their wooden uprights when the door opened or anybody brushed by behind. The grass plots were a startlingly vivid green, the mowing of which had been neglected, and, while the mangy buffalo robes covering Esmeralda's divan were not strictly medieval English, that was a trifle. And if the amateur painting of the full-armored knight pinned in the shiny-brown wooden frame was not of R. A. calibre, it was at least more beautiful than the life-size crayon portrait reposing behind it, and the two little pike-poles crossed above

the frame were a triumph. The rich valley with its blue creek showing between the back-stage curtains was a trifle close up to portray accurately,

*"That realm far off,*
*Where great Sir Percival holds sway,"*

but then, again, it must be the case that Sir Percival would be lurking somewhere nearby enough to get his cue, so why not spurring his coal-black charger up that blue road—or, if I said it was a creek, approaching under silken sail.

The audience was unsuspicious and accommodating, yearning as it was to be transported on a magic carpet. What recked it that the ladey Esmeralda's bower in the great castle was at the same time a sort of cow pasture. Her opening recitation had thrilled all hearts; the audience would still have gaped enchantingly if a wooden horse had stumped in, munched the fibre grass and then sat on the divan joking with Esmeralda and picking its teeth with one of the pike poles.

Presently milady leaned over graciously and pulled the tassel on the rope which rang the bell for a tire-woman. Of course, we did not hear the bell because the sound was deadened by massive walls, but the serving woman appeared nevertheless and with astonishing promptness.

*"Watch well, my girl, and let me know,*
*Should dust or flash down roadway show."*

The girl curtsied and turned meekly to watch well, but the next instant wheeled again to face her mistress. And it was well she did so, for there was another order.

*"Summon the scrivener, then, Susanne,*
*He's with my father now, I am persuaded."*

*"As thou sayst, lady, but—"*

Here Esmeralda tried desperately to remember just which lines of the original had been changed by Miss Freely, the elocution teacher in the select young ladies' college.

*". . . but—"*

Susanne gave her another chance, though Esmeralda only toyed unconcernedly with her embroidering,

*". . . but—"*

Susanne tried the third and last time for a bull's-eye.

*"But me no buts,"*

glowered the daughter of a king commandingly, which may have meant several things, but which most emphatically implied, "Get out!" which Susanne did with alacrity, leaving the Lady Esmeralda soliloquizing again until Meekil, the scrivener, appeared, carrying about a hundred weight of equipment, which corresponded to the modern reporter's note-book.

*"This to Sir Percival Semp of Chevickstowe."*

Meekil looked like the town cobbler, but his debut

in bright red underwear, a pair of wonderful snake-like slippers with swaying prows, a woman's blouse and a huge goose-quill behind each ear brought from the audience a gasp which broke quickly into a scream of laughter. Meekil moved as though to acknowledge the reception, but a forbidding finger under the embroidery warned him to find occupation preparing his stool, table and ink, not forgetting the blotting paper of the period, represented by a huge powder-shaker. But when he came to smoothing out the parchment, parchment there was none. "Pa-per!" Meekil sent a panicy hiss to the prompter, and in the curtained entrance there appeared with the missing material the grinning urchin with pancake ears, blushing in the belief that he was the leading man, which indeed, for the moment, he was.

"*Percival Semp from the Ladye Esmeralda,*" she began, the while pulling her needle out to arm's length with bored deliberation to register supreme loftiness of manner.

*"Greeting and warning may this be to thee.*
*Come hither ere the light of day goes out—"*

but the dictation was althogether too fast for the honest Meekil, who scorned to profane his picturesque trade by omitting so much as a flourish or a comma.

"Sss-sss-sss!" he warned very unstagily, while the unruffled Esmeralda echoed herself in monotones,

"*Come, hither, ere, the, light, of, day, goes, out,*"

though I recognized the angry spot on her brow and knew that Meekil was in for a bump.

"*Till, sundown, thou'rt, absolved, but—*"

"Sss-sss!" emitted the matter-of-fact scrivener again, but it was his downfall.

"*Give here the tablets, scrivener,*"

Esmeralda extemporized boldly,

"*'Twill be sundown ere thou write the thing.*"

The howl of merriment at this touch spoke the approval of every soul of us except Meekil, who gaped dumbly while his ladye cantered through a scolding love-letter in a manner to put a court stenographer to shame.

"*Get thee gone, thou bald head.*
*Stand not upon the order of thy going, but go at once.*"

Esmeralda was finding that her memory was nothing like so fluid as she had supposed, but she was determined that the play at least would flow on. The faultlessly-costumed scrivener, crestfallen at being apparently forbidden his lines, slunk out, his place being taken in less than a minute by Ben Jopp, servant to Percival, who bobbed up between the curtains as soon as Susanne had entranced and settled herself to chaperone the new scene.

"*My lord, Sir Percival of Chevickstowe, draws near,*" the servant announced with a bow, but foolishly

pausing too long before his next line, and miscuing Esmeralda, who promptly miscued back to save another ghastly pause,

*"Bow lower, varlet, know not who I am'st?"*

she frowned in a desperate attempt to gain time and to get her line from the prompter. Ben Jopp, with gorgeous slashed sleeves and a sort of velvet bag around his middle, bowed lower, so much lower that the point of his scabbard caught halfway up the back curtain and gracefully spilled his sword into the grass.

*"Sir Percival sends a posy and request for pardon."*

The posy was not forthcoming for some reason, rendering the situation nothing short of a nasty trifling with milady's feelings.

*"Will his ladye deign to send a message back?"*

For the life of her, Ethelfrinda couldn't think of any message biting enough to send back. In fact she realized the thing was getting out of hand. All she could remember was that she had an exit about this time, and she longed to make it.

*"Message forsooth! I must begone from here."*

but still the slow-witted Ben Jopp failed to get the hint. He continued to block the entrance.

*"He's got my letter, is't not so?"*

and the Lady Esmeralda, paralyzing the situation with haughtiness, floated away through the wings. What's the advantage of a castle of one's own, if one cannot get out otherwise than through the common door?

Ben Jopp and Susanne grinned confusedly at one another and the several prompters now on the job had just managed to get them saying something again when there entered casually the distraught Sir Percival, whose enormous plumes and magnificent cloak and top boots were the delight of all except the love-sick wearer himself. He was accompanied by his gay and roystering friend, Sir Gilbert Haverly, who feared nothing and held nothing sacred. I trembled for the time when Esmeralda would have to get rid of this hilarious dog.

*"They're all the same, self-willed and pert,*
*This wench's steps you've dogged for years,"*

he boasted, only he pronounced it "dodged."

After a long dialogue, in which the morose Percival persistently refused to be cheered up, the two strolled off through the curtains, the one bemoaning and the other scoffing, while Esmeralda and Susanne appeared to fill the gap, so smartly that the audience could not make out how they managed to miss the disconsolate dodger of footsteps. But the course of true love had a stile or two yet. Esmeralda carried a flower which the shrewd and observant wife by my side recognized at once as one taken from her own hat.

" *'He loves me, he loves me not—*"

but she was getting ahead of her story. A milliner's bud may lack the pristine beauty of the natural

bloom, but it has the advantage in tensile strength. The petals refused to part from the yellow centre, even for the daughter of a king. The Lady Esmeralda tried them all, but there was not a good-natured petal amongst them. Outside, the night was half full of Mount Shasta's bulk, but Esmeralda would have swapped the whole lump gladly for a single Shasta daisy. Seeing the trouble from his peep-hole, Sir Percival decided to act on his cue to enter stealthily and lean caressingly over his ladye. His stealth was done perfectly but, just as he leaned caressingly, Esmeralda made a last desperate effort to find out if she was loved. A petal came away, but the determined hand that snapped it collided forcibly the next instant with Sir Percival's nose. Again the house howled, but the actors pushed bravely on to the climax. Sir Gilbert and Ben Jopp slipped in for the final curtain as Sir Percival was inviting,

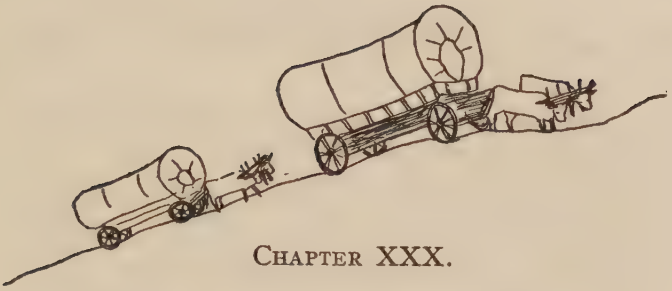
*"My fair, my own, I love thee*
*More than earth and heaven—"*

(We thought this very decent of him, in view of the blow on the nose)

*"—Come to these arms that long for thee."*

My suspicion that Esmeralda would not stand for this part was confirmed by the stern persistent way she had been forcing him back, step by step, until he

stood just outside the line of the curtain. At the pre-arranged cue, the property man gave the signal, the curtains came rapidly together on the wire, leaving Sir Percival outside. Too late, he lunged to get in, but at the same moment the Lady Esmeralda, generally unobserved, seized Ben Jopp by the gorgeous slashed sleeve and pushed him against the flimsy curtain. In delight Sir Percival clasped the bulge and embraced it.



## Chapter XXX.

## SHE SHOULD HAVE BEEN TOLD

IT WAS three evenings later that we rolled leisurely into Cottage Grove, a peaceful old town famous as a post on the Oregon Trail of '49. Portland was just a good day's run for the morrow. The Skipper retired early and I suggested to Dum that he invite Et to go for a walk with him. When he did so, she clapped her hands.

"I was just thinking how I'd like to prowl around by moonlight amongst the ghosts of prairie schooners and those hoary warehouses hanging over the Willamette."

It was an atmosphere created for wholesome undergraduates in the school of sex philosophy. They were away a long while and when they returned the glow on the face of each betrayed the fact that the evening had been spent among some more human companionships than pioneer lore and prairie schooner ghosts, though it has never come to my ears what the further subjects may have been.

"Well," I remarked casually to Et when Dum

was out of hearing a minute, "if nothing happens we'll pick up Clarry again to-morrow."

"Yes," she smiled contentedly, then, "You know, I'm anxious to see Clarry again." When she caught me trying to suppress my own smile she repeated more convincingly, "I am really, uncle Joe. He's going to be quite different, this time. In Sacramento he was just like I was myself when I was new to the land, so how could I object to his little ways. That wasn't the real Clarry you saw, either. Clarry's always been a great friend of ours; I know how it was last week. He was just a little bit out of step with the West."

When she had looked us both a frank and grateful good-night, and given Dum an extra thank-you pat on the shoulder, he and I settled down to drone away our night-cap cigarettes.

"Say, Joe!" This, from Dum, could always be translated into, "I've got something to say to Joe." "A few weeks ago, when we were coming down this road, I told you that this girl meant a good deal to me."

"She's turning out a little brick, isn't she?"

"No! She isn't 'turning out' a brick. She never fooled me into thinking she was anything else. But—" he seemed to be giving himself a last chance at holding back. "You remember, too, I promised

you, at that time, that I'd never try to win her. I didn't know I was lying."

"Yes. What of it? I'm not blaming you."

"No, but I'm blaming you," he concluded bluntly. "That girl should have been told—in the first place —about me."

## Chapter XXXI.

## SHEEP'S CLOTHING AND CAVE MEN

IT WOULD be unsafe to suppose that our niece had fallen in love with my old friend. Aside from the fact that Dum was never the man to be infatuated over, infatuation is a weakness of the trashy-hearted, while love is an accomplishment of the seasoned mind. Et did not come of the stuff that breeds infatuation; on the other hand, she had not lived long enough or widely enough to be able to create within herself an abiding love of man. Most of her years she had been a prisoner shut in from the ways of life, and at the present moment was spreading her wings for her first unlaced flutterings. Her gaiety and bubbling affection were merely the outward expression of a new joy at being natural, but her progress along the devious paths of love was no further than a capacity for feeling joyful dependence on a man. Her hourly speculation and wondering were still of Clarry; Dum was too strong and dependable to invite speculation. She had always thought of Clarry as peculiarly hers; it had not really concerned her as to whether she was peculiarly Clarry's. Ethelfrinda Dolbrook's place in the world had always been to be admired and deferred to. The significance of the word "service" had never appealed to her: it

stood for the way they did things for you in restaurants and shops.

The Skipper had asked her one day whether Clarry had ever really proposed to her. "Proposed? Clarry?" she had opened her eyes. "Why, auntie, Clarry's the sort of man who's always proposing." "To you?" asked the Skipper naively. "Well—?" A queer smile ending in a nervous little laugh grew out of Et's reviewing. "I had supposed so. But, now I come to think of it, I don't see quite how Clarry, if I was away, could help going on proposing —to somebody."

"Clarry," Et remarked this morning, as we bowled along happily, "was always so attentive and admiring to me that perhaps—"

"Why, here's where we had the collision, isn't it?" somebody interrupted as we curved into the well-remembered subway of that accident.

"Au revoir!" The Skipper sarcastically threw a kiss to the spot as we passed it. "I'll remember you in my nightmares."

"I'll always remember it by something else," archly from Et, and of course we all asked "Why?"

"As the place where Mr. Atwood told me to shut up."

"Ho-ho . . . ho-ho-ho! That's not good enough. I'll remember it as the place where I made you shut up."

Arrived back in Portland, we established ourselves

at our friendly old hotel. By a curious coincidence or an uncanny memory at the office, we were given the same rooms we occupied a month before. The Skipper and Et ran about like children recognizing the pictures, the pin-cushion, the elevator girls, the view from each window. It was just like getting home. And were we not to see Clarry again, the good old friend Clarry whose false-face only we had met in Sacramento?

The switch-board girl located his hotel and, as it was still early in the afternoon, Et rang him without delay or constraint. The Skipper had gone out to make a purchase. Et and I were alone. She smilingly pushed away the curls with her free hand, while she listened for his voice and prepared for action. It was rather winsome in her that she never seemed to want to hear anything or to say anything to which others might not listen. To me it was still more winsome that she often preferred me as the listener.

"Well, Clarry lad," I heard her begin in her soft, persuasive voice, "Did you expect to hear from me so soon?"

"Just about now, yes," the answer startled me. It was one of those occasions when the other voice fills the room like a mechanical ghost. "I'm hoping to see you, of course—ah!—quite a lot, y'know." Ghostly pause. "It's mighty good to hear your voice, too. Yes, indeed!"

"Well, you know where to find us." There was a threatening challenge in the cool answer.

"Yes—yes, I think I could find it all right. Say, Ettie!—I was just thinking. I hope you won't mind. The position's like this. When I got here Tuesday I had a letter to some cousins of my father's. They're a live bunch and got me into a tennis tournament at their club the same day. I just got through my third round, on the right side, this morning, and I'm slated for the finals in the mixed doubles Saturday—that's to-morrow, y'know—and—I've promised to turn up at five o'clock for a last work-out."

"Oh! Then how about this eve—?"

"Well, I was just going to say—I'm awfully sorry about it, but there'll be arranging to do afterwards—and that sort of thing. But how about the morning to-morrow?"

"Just as you like, Clarry. Mr. Curlew doesn't plan leaving here until Sunday. I'd better not keep you now. Good-ni—"

"Say, Et!—Hello—hello—Oh, you're still there. I didn't like to ask you out to the club. I'm practically a stranger myself—and—I know you wouldn't care to leave your crowd, anyway."

"Oh, that's all right, Clarry."

"I thought you'd rather not, dear. Till the morning, then! And I'll be thinking about you."

Et knew I had heard. Without any words of comment, she turned and looked out of the window,

long and meditatively, her chin in her hands. *L'Allegro* of a moment ago had changed to *Il Penseroso*. A very pretty piece of statuary the cogitator made, framed there in the large window, high above the city's life and troubles. My thoughts, too, were serious, but I decided that mine were not seasonable enough for words. To Et I wanted just then to be a sister—another part of a girl's battle equipment which had been denied her—but regretfully I recognized my deficiencies.

Plainly she was disappointed, doubtless she felt a pang at this break in Clarry's constant enthusiasm, not unmixed with a sense of humiliation. As I quietly watched the calm and saddened gaze of her usually quick, dancing eyes, I realized that she was fighting out her own little question—as, in spite of her pampered existence, she had always been obliged to do—in loneliness.

Presently she stirred herself sharply, just as though somebody had called "Time!" She stood up smiling.

"Well, old dear," with the frankest kind of blush in her deliberate look into my face, "let us away to the Skipper! I just know that she and Mr. Atwood will have been out gunning for our evening program."

There was nothing assumed in her gaiety. Et was never long in choosing a course, and her decision now had completely unclouded her brow. As we sat, that evening, in a vaudeville theatre and watched a

gay crowd of young people trip in and fill two of the boxes, Et was disturbed least of any of us when we recognized the handsome and well-groomed Clarry among the party. Dum regarded him with an unflickering stare of stored-up rage, but to Et the young man had become merely an impersonal person.

It was the same next morning at ten o'clock when Clarry piled into the back seat with her. She smiled sweetly, talked unblushingly, listened unimpressed, unemotionally.

They invited me in as a filler, leaving Dum quite happy with the Skipper to help him guide us along the wonders of the Columbia River Highway.

Clarry was really charming that morning. He seemed bent on being agreeable; in his eye was a gleam of determination to be agreeable. That he had a dereliction to atone for seemed utterly lost on Et, who eagerly followed his account of his week's activities, never essayed to disturb his narration by any detail of her own doings, and even unblinkingly sympathized, like a benevolent aunt, when he half slipped into apologizing,

"I was sorry about yesterday. It seemed to require almost the whole evening to arrange the details for the final of the tournament this afternoon."

Although this speech was apparently received without notice in the regular stream of conversation, I think we must have felt a little bit shocked. Af-

terwards we lapsed into discussion of the beauties of the drive.

The Columbia River Highway is one of those things so much photographed and advertised that the experienced globe-trotter just knows it's going to be disappointing, but which is nevertheless literally as unique and delightful as the books have told. Beyond St. Peter's Dome we anchored a while at Crown Point, and joined the chorus of raptures which is a continuous performance at that spot. Then down the green-embowered feather-stitching to the foot of the mountain wall where everything is cool except the brake-bands, and on along by the toes of the great cliffs past the vapory falls at Latourell, Sheppard's Dell and Bridal Veil to the full stop at Multnomah where the cooling water-spout floats out from the mountain like a dancer's scarf in a double tumble of nine hundred feet.

A few miles farther along—I think it was somewhere near Horsetail Falls—we stopped to have our picnic. As soon as he dared, Clarry urged Et to go for a walk. His urgings came so near to the limits of politeness that Et consented, but she ran back for her hat and whispered to the Skipper as she picked it up, "Please, all of you come for a walk—and follow us!" Evidently she feared some flirtatious attempt on Clarry's part which, to-day, would be highly unwelcome.

Some distance along we saw Clarry draw her over

to the side of a concrete arch bridge, on which they leaned in close conversation while the three of us sauntered ahead. Fifty yards beyond I noticed a beaten path leaving the highway and leading down and back through the bracken and under the arch. The Skipper looked behind once and saw that the pair had resumed their walk, but the second look revealed an empty road. Quite evidently they had taken the path down under the bridge. A minute or two longer Dum and I chatted on merrily until our amusingly preoccupied companion exclaimed,

"We'd better turn! I don't like to leave Et—"

"Nonsense!" I chided her. "Don't let yourself be disturbed over trifles." But she had her way.

To leave the road where the path forked would have looked like prying, but as we came near the bridge the Skipper was trying hard to see where the path led after it came out again from the arch. Dum laughed his characteristic "Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!" just as we crossed the bridge when I happened to say something that amused him. At almost the same moment we heard a distressed, almost an angry, cry,

"Dum! I want you."

We all ran to the edge and looked over. The path was perhaps ten feet below. With a second or two's hesitation to choose the most likely-looking shrubbery to break his fall, Dum vaulted the parapet and was down.

He stumbled as he struck ground, but was on his

feet in an instant, and in that instant Et, trying to free herself from Clarry's love making, managed to emerge from under the arch so that the Skipper and I could just catch sight of them. Quite before we realized whether it was a farce or a melodrama, we saw Dum pounce on Clarry's shoulders and tear away his hold of the breathless little figure. I verily believe that Clarry was dislodged by surprise more than by force. He recovered so quickly that, without even an instant's pause to free his eyes of the cowlick shaken over them, he threw himself into an attitude of attack with the challenge,

"To hell with you, Atwood."

If Dum had any idea of avoiding it, such possibility was gone now. Fight was the word. We watched him feel ahead a step or two on his toes looking for a better footing, as Clarry waited, studying him for an opening, with the eye of a trained boxer. The Skipper held her breath and clutched my arm more closely.

Here before us, as though fallen from the bright and peaceful sky of polite convention, was human nature reverted to the cave-man. Our guests, our decorous companions of a moment ago, faced each other in murderous intent, breathing hate and vengeance, every instinct gone except the primal instinct to destroy. Standing here on this ribboning concrete, last and ultra modern step on the staircase of civilization, we beheld being enacted a few feet away on

the virgin face of earth, the elemental, eternal triangle of animate life, two males battling for the female.

Dum had been trained to fight in every sphere but the squared circle, but there was no mistaking the confident poise of Clarry Wentworth. I expected to see a rough-and-tumble but, just in time, Clarry hissed, "None of your wrestling!" He feinted once or twice, quickly and bafflingly, then led so rapier-like that I couldn't see what happened until Dum grunted from a blow on the chest which instantly stopped his catlike advancing. He tried to strike back, late and at the wrong moment as an unpractised fighter will, and was promptly staggered by two or three contacts on shoulders and sides delivered so quickly that Clarry was back out of range before any of us could realize he had struck.

Dum had been hit a number of times without doing the slightest damage; he was at a greater disadvantage than I had supposed. During one of his wild swings his guard was struck down, so that he spun half around. But he was back in a second for more, this time surprising his adversary by getting to close quarters and delivering a straight right and left that won a blink and a gasp from the astonished Clarry. It was like being hit with the butt end of a telegraph pole to judge from his expression as he pantingly shouted, "Don't you hit me in a clinch again."

The result of these words was a distinct point for

him, because Dum, instead of following right in and staying there, fell back into the orthodox attitude of a pugilist, the very position where he became a target.

Et had run a few yards up the path as though to escape. Then she turned in fascination to watch. Her two hands were clasped tightly into a single fist and her lips opened once or twice as though to say, "Stop!" But evidently she decided not to risk being ignored: this thing couldn't be stopped short of a file of police or a decision.

Clarry got his breath and sparred on with a renewal of his first success. He jabbed and hooked almost at will, while Dum delivered at intervals a vicious punch on the empty air. "If Dum ever gets him again," I made myself believe, "he's liable to kill him," but I could not help noticing that Clarry was apparently respecting the still ugly cut on Dum's cheek.

Though my old friend went on taking more nasty jabs, it was apparent after another minute that he was not trying to lead. Evidently he realized he was not sufficiently skilful to get through often enough to be worth the punishment. But he was keeping Clarry busy, rushing forward each time the younger man drew back for a rest and then dodging or drawing back, to minimize the blows he could not prevent. I wondered if he had any plan, until I noticed how hard Clarry's breath was coming. The boxer was

tiring out. Dum is of the not uncommon type of man who never seems to take any regular exercise, but whose wind is good and muscles just naturally sound and like wire cables. Clarry was perhaps two inches the taller, but his shoulders were narrow. Dum had felt his worst punches and knew that the tennis player had not the strength to knock him out. So he was waiting, and gaining every second he waited. There was no three-minute bell and Clarry began to labour and breathe heavily through his mouth. Dum was panting audibly, but standing up to Clarry's fifty per cent mauling like a lion. He had the supreme advantage of being able to stand up like a lion even if he went on panting all day.

An unconscious speculative excitement possessed me and I suddenly found what it was. Would some unlucky blow get Dum in a vital spot before he decided to rush in like a bull and break Clarry's ribs?

When Clarry was not sleepy-eyed trying to get his breath, his face indicated angry disgust at the crude, unboxerlike methods pitted against him.

Then it came, the moment Dum had chosen. As might be expected, he failed to take advantage of one of Clarry's moments of exhaustion, but dashed in just as the boy had had a few seconds' respite. For a brief second a perfect hailstorm of shots seemed to be knocking Dum's body into angles and pits, then, with his face almost touching Clarry's body, he

brought his left a mighty swipe on the side ribs and with his right struck Clarry, it appeared, exactly in the windpipe.

He dropped without a whimper and his opponent stood over him in stupid indecision. There was no one to instruct him, nobody to count. Suddenly Dum seemed to recall what started the row, and, with true cave-man instinct, he grabbed Clarry and made as though to take him up the path towards Et.

"Don't! Don't come up here," she cried. "Leave him alone; haven't you done enough to him?" and she fled away to join her aunt on the bridge. Whatever her fear of her ungallant admirer, she seemed still more afraid of her rescuer.

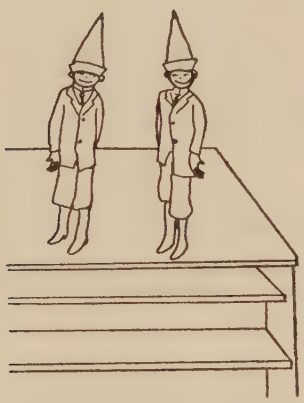
The two women met, the Skipper drawing Et away with a friendly pat, and I hurried down towards Clarry. Dum, as soon as he noticed my intention, dragged himself towards the roadway, smoothing out his clothes and panting like a dog in warm weather. He looked like a shamed schoolboy over it all.

I found Clarry and put my arm under his shoulder in a brotherly way to help him to his feet. He asked me if I would drive him back to Multnomah where he could get a train into Portland, and I assured him that it was the least I could do, if he preferred it. The boy was sport enough not to bear me any ill-will, even though he knew I was a moral force against him. "Between you and me, sir, this was coming to me,"

he nodded in a way that I liked, when he was shaking my hand. "I'm still hoping, one day, to gain your confidence." But to Dum, as he passed along above us on the road, he had shouted,

"You damn clown! If I can ever get you into a ring under fight rules, Atwood, I'll knock you to kingdom come."

The last I saw of Dum he was settled rather disconsolately on a big stone and Et was trying to make up her mind to go over and share his joyless victory.



## Chapter XXXII.

## THE ACID TEST

OUR RETURN to town was made with depressed and embarrassed thoughts. In the rear seat was intermittent tearful whisper and constant petting. The more time she had for reflection, the more was Et overwhelmed by events.

"So absolutely crazy of me to have shouted," she wept to the Skipper. "I just couldn't stand his trying to make love to me—after he had lied to me. But I should have had the courage to make him understand.

"Even when he frightened me, why didn't I call uncle Joe? Of course, Clarry had to fight Mr. Atwood, but with uncle Joe he wouldn't have dared. Oh, I can't think what it was possessed me to call—that man."

At the hotel she accepted Dum's offered hand to the curb. She tried to smile at him gratefully, but it was a gratitude of obligation, from shy eyes and a face paled to the lips.

Although it was only three o'clock, my wife whispered that they probably would not come down until dinner time. In one of the big rotunda chairs Dum rocked himself for five thoughtful minutes, then snapped his fingers for a bell-boy and wrote a

telegram to Vancouver, "If anything of importance, wire me here."

"That may bring me some diversion for the afternoon," he sighed, then as he strode off, "Come up to my room after you've finished your letters."

An hour later I opened his door and for a moment might have supposed myself confronted by the metamorphosed Dum back in his business den, glowering like a bronze Cæsar. He was scribbling all over a lot of yellow forms. On my heels came a boy with another telegram. I felt as though I was blocking traffic.

"Come in!" Dum shouted brusquely. "Sit down! Have a smoke! Amuse yourself! How y'getting on?" He slipped his pencil behind his ear and ripped an end off the new message. "I'm having lots of fun here."

He frowned momentarily at the open damp-looking sheet without waiting for me to speak, tossed it on top of some others and resumed writing. He was coatless and collarless, a long unlighted cigar at one end of his lips and his hair ruffled. Barnum's circus could not have coaxed a smile. With Dum, business was a fine frenzy that made him look forty instead of thirty.

"Well, you old puffing-Billy," I threw at him in mock annoyance, getting up, "this is no place for a man trying to make a good fellow of himself." As I was halfway out he looked up.

"What'd y'say, old chap? Yes, better run along out and buy yourself collars and things. I'm busy as the devil, and," turning impatiently to his papers, "for once in my life, I hope it never lets up." The boy ran into me, grinning, with another yellow envelope. From down the corridor, I could hear, "All right, son, keep 'em coming."

As I strolled aimlessly in front of Portland's shop-windows and lolled in the park I was covetous of the refuge Dum had found for himself. But when I went up to him again at seven o'clock he was in quite a different mood.

"Say, Joe! I don't suppose anybody will be keen on going anywhere to-night?"

"Scarcely."

"I'm not going to have that girl in ignorance about me any longer. I'm in reckless mood, and I'm going to take advantage of it."

"Perhaps I could get my wife to—"

"No! That's too late now. I'll do it myself. But if I make any proposition you back me up, eh?"

"I guess you can depend on me. I'll call their room at once."

Et was surprisingly *chic* after her rest. Dinner was got through with in encouraging sociability, but when we came out of the dining-room there was the awkward indecision Dum had forseen.

"Let's see if we can find a quiet corner out here

on the veranda," he announced decisively. "I've got something to say."

In nervous silence the ladies went in the direction indicated. It was dark enough to be a protection to facial expression. I managed to sit next the Skipper as we settled in unhurried deliberation. Dum's cigar glowed steadily a while. We were quite by ourselves, and there was intense silence amongst us.

"I've had the feeling, Miss Dolbrook, that, so far as you are concerned, I may be sailing under false colours—in remaining with the party."

"Oh, I'm sure you couldn't do that." Et's voice just succeeded in being natural.

"Early last winter I met a woman, on a business trip I was obliged to make—on one of our coast steamers. Women have seldom held an individual interest for me—but this one appealed to me. She was of an unusual type—you'd say stunning—Spanish, as a matter of fact." Dum spoke with slow distinctness, pausing between sentences to draw and expel smoke. "I became engaged to her, and consented to having our marriage secret. We started away on a honeymoon. By a remarkable and unpleasant coincidence I discovered that the woman I believed I had married was simply an adventuress —in certain quarters rather well known. I returned home on the first train. She followed me. But, as my lawyers hadn't much difficulty in establishing a

previous marriage existing, the humiliating matter was, in a legal sense at least, closed.

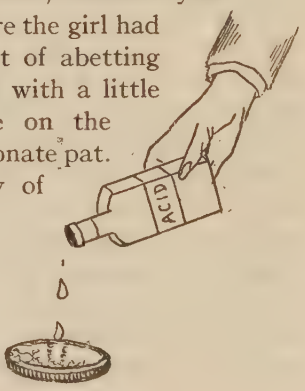
"That's all, Miss Dolbrook. It isn't a pleasant story, but I've been appearing in bad faith in a sense that you didn't know it."

Not a word about his urgings of me in the past few weeks to have her informed, no excuses for himself, no request for sympathy.

"I'm very, very sorry about it, Mr. Atwood," came Et's friendly voice, but it was unmistakable that an impersonal friendliness had taken the place of a shy doubting sentiment, a tone I had not recognized until it was gone.

"Of course it does—make a difference," she told her aunt when they had a chance to talk together. "It's hard to decide just how much difference. You'd say it was all the woman's fault, wouldn't you?"

For the past week or more the girl had developed the trifling habit of abetting her "Good night!" to Dum with a little pinch on the sleeve—once on the cheek—or a playfully affectionate pat. But tonight a smiling pity of the eyes sufficed.



## Chapter XXXIII.

## KALEIDOSCOPE EVENTS

JUST before we had come out on the veranda, Dum had slipped into a telephone booth. I turned once to look at him through the glass, attracted by the unwonted noisiness of his voice. "No, I won't. I'll come alone!" was all I overheard, but my brows must have puckered as I walked away.

Sunday morning, while I was dressing hurriedly in order to get down first and have a minute alone with him, I wondered again whom he had been shouting at and where it was he insisted on going alone. Then something prompted me to peer into the dining-room and I spied the familiar gray suit off in a secluded corner. Within a few yards of it, however, I paused, horrified, when an unfamiliar mutilated face was turned on me. The face grinned weirdly, and I sat down beside it—almost collapsed at the sight and realization.

"Good heavens, Dum, what's happened?" I gulped and blinked.

"Well, you see I had a little pugilistic appointment last night." His one eye which wasn't closed glinted at me horribly but I could only sit, petrified. "The dance after the tennis finals didn't break up till twelve, but most of the men were on hand just the same. Fine, sportsmanlike bunch they were, too."

"Do you mean to say you took up that darn fool challenge about a fight under fight rules?"

"Well—why shouldn't I?" In addition to his bruised and swollen eye, Dum had a cut on the aristocratic bridge of his nose that looked as if it should be kept closed with court plaster. There was a raw spot on his ear and one drawing attention to another swelling on his chin. I was shocked, and I was enraged at the beating he seemed to have endured. But these feelings gave way, after a few seconds, to self-reproach and mortification at my inability to remain serious. When Dum smiled, the purple upper right of his face maintained a passive resistance. At that evil moment nothing in the world was half so funny as a face in a three-quarter smile.

Another minute and the ladies entered. Seeing us, they came over. There was a whole chapter written on Et's face. Her daylight misgiving was in the grip of a powerful resolve. She was simply going to make herself believe that Dum was blameless. Cruel though the effort might be, she would *appear* the same. In the averted eyes as she approached was merely a gathering of effort. Immediately she was seated she would look fearlessly and smilingly into his face.

She was seated. She looked into his face—fearlessly and, alas, smilingly! The three-quarters

features had grinned, cuts and all, but it was that puffy rebellious quarter that did the mischief.

It was heartless to laugh, shameful. The sudden terror in the girl's look was merely a fear lest she allow herself to meet the Skipper's eyes or mine. That would be fatal. Presently, in her embarrassment (an embarrassment unrelated to the embarrassment she had anticipated) she seized a life-saving diversion: anger at Clarry.

"So he lured you up there amongst all his friends! Mean cowardly trick I call it. The trainer used to say he made a splendid showing for his year in the sparring classes. It's just contemptible of him to have treated you like that—Dum."

"Yes, you poor," the Skipper proved her innocence by a glistening tear, "poor fellow. I think he was a perfect beast. Is there anything at all that we can do for you?"

"Oh, I can hardly contain myself when I think of it," Et returned to the attack. "If I ever get hold of that Clarry Wentworth—! Of course he'd learned to box; he spent a lot of money on it. Boxing was one of just two or three things Clarry knows anything about. But it wasn't fair. Talk about a fair fight—fair!" Then turning on Dum that maiden-aunt expression, "I'm so sorry for you. I am really. Don't you believe—?"

"Say, hold on!" and as it was an even half of his face only (the lower half) that tried to smile, we looked

at him in safety. "You needn't be so dashed sorry for me. I don't want to be petted. I've told you it was a fair fight. And maybe Clarry wasn't so tickled to death over it either."

"Did you get him two or three?" I spoke at last, after having watched Dum trying to endure the commiseration.

"Well, yes—maybe I did."

"You bet he did!" I piped up, encouraged. "Where did you get him, Dum? Come on, now?"

"How do I know," and the three-quarter grin returned to torment us, but a reciprocal smile was permissable now. "To tell the truth, in the last round I couldn't see very well where I was getting him, but they told me I got—a decision."

For the remainder of the day, the bashed face served a very useful purpose. It kept the disturbing revelations of last night in the background.

Our route lay up the Columbia two hundred miles then across country to Walla Walla and Spokane, and north through Idaho to British Columbia. As the day wore on, however, all our plans kept coming back to one conclusion—we would arrive at Banff a week too soon for the road-opening. Recollections of the haste we had frequently made was provoking, the side trips we should have taken and the fatigue needlessly endured.

Without knowing how it came about, I had all at once announced a new plan. Instead of going on

to Walla Walla, we would cross the river at Arlington and climb the hills over into the Yakima Valley. There, only a few hours from Vancouver by rail, we would rest a week while Dum spent the time at home on urgent business advised to him in Portland. The proposal was welcomed by the others, probably in view of the disturbing events of the past few days.

An hour later, pulling into Arlington village singing "One More River" (for some reason a change of plan always throws a motoring party into spirits of clamourous excitement), I found myself cogitating as to how and why Dum had managed to bring me to suggest the change. I had, in the end, been the one to suggest it, yet I was conscious of no scheme, thought or wish to do so.

After passing the summit of the Cascades and the city of The Dalles, we were in the dry-belt. Arlington, while on the banks of the muddy Columbia, is one of those places that make you nervous about stopping, lest the life-giving water pipe burst and leave the population to parch amid the alkali hills.

We had dinner at the most countrified hotel we had yet found and went to church. Our clamourous spirits had subsided and we had somehow drifted into a humour which the simple service and hearty singing fitted uncommonly well. After dismissal the minister stopped us at the door to shake hands.

"Where's Et—and Dum?" The Skipper wheeled suddenly as the little congregation thinned away.

When the last footsteps had diminished into silence and lights had popped on here and there in living-rooms of the late worshippers, we went back to our rooms, not knowing whether to be amused or annoyed.

It was an hour and a half later that I came downstairs into the time-table and calendar bedecked office. Men sat with feet on the rail of a cold stove. Dum and Et were standing over against the wall studying a large map of the county. But something in their attitude told me it was an excuse to avoid the attention of the loungers. As I joined them from behind I noticed that their shoes were thickly coated with dust. Dum's look avoided me, but the blank trouble in Et's pained features prompted me to lay a light companionable hand on the shoulder of each. Clearly something had happened, something vital amongst us as friends. That it could not be mentioned was equally clear. I pretended to study the map with them, making conversation by pronouncing the uninteresting places—Lone Rock, Clem, Olex, Sixprong, 30-Mile Creek, Fossil. They meant nothing, but the stress of the moment has printed them in my memory.

"Is auntie upstairs?" Et's voice was a wavering whisper. "I think I'll go up," and she lifted her hand to my fingers on her shoulder, pinched weakly a moment and turned a pity-beseeching eye to me as she ran towards the stairs.

Dum and I went out and in a few minutes were in the open country.

"Is there anything the matter?" I asked.

"I've upset the apple-wagon, that's all."

"You don't mean to tell me you spoke to her?"

"Yes—I did."

"Holy Moses! Just at this time! And in a place like this!"

"Well, Joe, it looked like the proper occasion to me. We've got rid of that other fellow; I'd told her the worst about myself and I'm leaving the party to-morrow. The moment you've got the misunderstandings cleared away, you know, is the right time to ask a fellow to sign a contract."

" 'Sign a contract!' " I tried to wither him. "And I'll bet a dollar you told her you had enough to feed the two of you, that you were sound in wind and limb and that your ancestors were respectable, that you have a steady job and that in case you croaked she'd have twenty thousand insurance?"

"Suppose I did. All of those things look to me like part of the proposition."

" 'The proposition!' Gee whizz, Dum, can't you get sentimental for once in your life. This isn't a horse trade. Your proposition! Don't you know that any girl worth having demands a proposal. The 'proposition' kind goes to the highest bidder."

I looked sideways at my honest friend a while as

we walked. I wanted to be sympathetic, but was impelled instead to be cross and impatient.

"I guess there's no doubt about it; you offered that highly-bred, high-spirited and highly sensitive little lady a good business deal."

"Oh, I don't know about that, Joe. I acted as gently as I felt I had any right to do."

"Y'did. What did you do? Did you offer so much as to hold her hand?"

"Well, no. I just stopped her, made her look at me frankly, and asked for an answer."

"Good heavens! And with that face!"

I realized in a moment that this was very unkind. Jarred into repentance by his silence, I added, "Anyway, cheer up! What she may have said doesn't count for anything."

"She said—"

"Don't tell me!" I stopped him. "It makes no difference what she said. She wasn't in a fit state to give evidence."

"Maybe, Joe. But I never come back twice with the same proposition—proposal."

## Chapter XXXIV.

## HEJIRA?

IT WAS a morning when thoughts and lips must be guarded nervously. It was like carrying a heavy mental anchor. Overflowing with sympathy, yet not daring to utter a word. Our one-time uneasiness at the prospect of picking up Clarry provoked now only a smile in indistinct retrospect. Even the outbreak at Horsetail Falls might have cleared the air, but instead had charged it with earthquake, and each of the succeeding embarrassments had belittled the last one.

At the farm house and freight shed called Roosevelt, Wash., where the tiny ferry had spilled us ashore, there were two roads leading equally to nowhere. A little boy and girl and a frisking delighted collie dog led me to the farm-wife.

"No, no," she sighed at the depth of my ignorance, "that 'un just goes up the creek a piece. This here one y're on is the chief state highway to Bickleton."

Bickleton. The name sounded like nothing and meant nothing. Yesterday it did not exist. But as we crept up that huge stark gully, Big Horse and Wood Gulch creeks sinking amid the arid hills to a perilous depth on our left, and scanned the barren upheaved landscape for a sign of human habitation, we

had time to wonder if Bickleton was a place where people lived. In a few miles our complaining, bubbling-over engine lifted us twenty-eight hundred feet, at times grinding ahead between gulf and sky like navigating a scratch on an elephant's back. At the top nothing new, but the map promised Bickleton in eighteen miles. What was it anyway? How long it was in coming! Would we ever really get there, and when? In one short hour Bickleton had loomed out of obscurity and had eclipsed our whole catalogue of names; it was really the only place on earth of any account.

Even Bickleton, low, straggling and grayed, had at last slipped by, then a dozen miles of hub-deep dust and a few drab thirsty-looking ranches. Then, all in an instant, we came out onto the edge of the Mabton Ridge and beheld, a thousand feet below, the broad level bosom of the Yakima Valley—alluring and resplendent in its tailored coat of many colours.

All morning, and afternoon for we had no disposition for lunch, shyness seemed to have shackled us into nervous derelicts. Had we just stopped a while and got away, singly or in pairs, it would have been a relief but any attempt at general conversation

smacked of the proverbial lighted-match search for the gasoline. Had the new embarrassment come inevitably to stay, we would doubtless have faced it more frankly and cheerfully, but as it was guaranteed to be with us only a few hours, we preferred to remain thoroughly uncomfortable for that time.

We reached our destination with plenty of time to establish ourselves at the hotel before it was necessary to get Dum to the railway station. His good-bye was quite the most awkward hurdle of the day. Whether it was Good-bye or Au Revoir was a doubt each of us entertained. All day I had kept wanting to ask him.

"Well, come along, old chap," I spoke to get it over quickly with. "If there's no chance of your giving it up. We've got less than fifteen minutes."

"Good-bye, then, Mrs. Curlew," he shook hands quickly. Somehow, without emphasizing it, he avoided Et until I was starting the car. Then he waved and she waved back, quickly as though she had been waiting for it.

"Now, Dum," on the railway platform I tried to be sharp and business-like, "you'll let us know in good time just when to—"

"Say, what do you know about it!" he interrupted.

"My bag went into the hotel with the rest. What had I better do?"

"She's due now in less than five minutes," I reasoned quickly. "Let me see if I can get back with it in time."

Disregarding the speed laws, I reached the hotel and jumped out, grabbed Dum's luggage from the pile at the pillar and was making off with it when Et, hatless, ran out to the car.

"Let me take it," she panted.

"Can you manage the car?" I asked, grinning inordinately.

"I'll risk it, if you will," and in a moment she was clashing gears but on her way.

I stood just where I was, listening, wraptly listening as though life depended on it. Minutes went by, three, five, six, seven glad thankful minutes of lateness, then at last the booming whistle of a locomotive, like the tardy answer to a roll-call.

The Skipper had gone out to the shops, so I went up to the window of my front room to wait excitedly. I saw the familiar car run into its place at the curb. As Et hopped out and tucked up a curl here and there I was quick to notice an added ounce of buoyancy in her movements. As she came up the outside steps she seemed to be trying not to run.

So nervous that I could no longer remain seated, I hurried out into the hall to meet her.

"I got him! I got him, uncle Joe," she bubbled, as she ran to me eagerly. In the half light of the late afternoon I could see her eyes smile and snap. "And listen!" she took hold of my two lapels and pulled me down, "He'll be back—a week from yesterday morning."

I tried to say, "Good!" but the silly tears of a boy suddenly filled my eyes. I picked up one smooth warm hand and kissed it, but before I could blink more than once or twice she had bolted and I heard the door of her room bang gaily.

## Chapter XXXV.

## TURNING A NEW LEAF ALL ROUND

WE PICKED up Dum at Ellensburg. All at once I found myself spying furtively on him, and treating him with an absurd politeness—the politeness due to a stranger in our midst.

While Et talked to him, forgivably embarrassed, he looked unrestrained boyish comradeship into her eyes. He bantered, cajoled and teased ridiculously. Clearly, he was no more in love with her than is the festive curate in love with the ladies of the sewing circle. All of his sober attitude of business was gone. A week ago he would have been busy calculating the car-loading capacity of the town or the deposits in the national banks, but in the interval he had somewhere picked up his lost youth and intended putting it to a jolly use. In short, he was all at once like other young men. For some reason we were all disappointed.

We spent the night at Vantage Ferry, a lonely spot, two hundred miles above Arlington on the Columbia. Evening had come to be recognized as our opportunity for confidences. Dum walked with me as usual; he talked of all sorts of things, he even discussed ourselves, but I had the unmistakable feeling that I was no longer his confidante.

Back in the privacy of our room, the Skipper's sober talk reflected the other conversation.

"Et seems to be worrying," and the speaker herself seemed disturbed. "I can't quite make her out."

"What are you afraid of?" I tried to sound unconcerned, but she kept her fear to herself all at once. "She's not unhappy about Dum?" I snapped as though quite unsuspicious.

"Not at all!" proudly rising to defend her sex. "She's puzzled, I think. She wants to do him justice and she's afraid she hasn't. For a while she sounded shuddery at mention of that confession of his marriage, but still she keeps asking me what I think of it."

"Well? What do you think of it?"

"Of course I've—well, I've recommended her to decide for herself. If it was a man she really was interested in, would she rather think of him as boyishly ignorant of that kind of woman, or would she have him accustomed to the type?"

"And has she decided?"

For answer the Skipper bit her lower lip a few seconds and glanced up mistrustingly.

The following night at Spokane she pursued the matter a little more daringly. It was after dinner. We were looking for seats in one of the many lounging places of the great hotel. A bell-boy paged "Miss Dolbrook" who was wanted on the house telephone.

"It will be the housekeeper," explained my wife. "She was to tell Et when that room adjoining ours

was vacant." Then turning brightly to Dum as though to take advantage of our niece's absence,

"I'm quite too tired to go anywhere to-night. You just take Et off somewhere by yourselves."

"Now, now, Skipper," as he jauntily slipped his arm into hers and led her away a few discreet steps. Nothing could have emphasized his intention more than the use of my pet nickname. "That isn't necessary. It's much jollier when we're all together —I prefer it."

Assuredly he had returned to us merely to see his undertaking through. So far as Et was concerned the ass would stick to his word.

Judging by the girl's face when she came back, I could almost have thought she had overheard the conversation. Afterwards she sat listening absently to our remarks but was herself wordless. She changed her seat once or twice, laid a forefinger several times on her closed lips, while her thoughts seemed to be following the glances she darted into far corners of the spacious rooms. Was she looking for an avenue of escape, I wondered. In a whisper I asked the Skipper if she had told Et of Dum's refusal. "Of course not!"

It was the proposal to retire early that seemed to interest her. "Yes, auntie," she agreed, rising, "I feel I'd like to."

Dum made his formal disappearance and we stepped into our rooms which were off the writing-

room spaces on the mezzanine floor. A minute or two later I was reaching again where I had put my pumps, remembering a letter which must be despatched to-night. While from her dressing-table the Skipper was calling the usual question as to whether the morning would not do, I happened to hear the bolt being turned in the door connecting Et's room. Possibly she locked the door every night, but I had not happened to hear it. I paused a moment, answered my wife, and then stepped out to seek the quietest of the quiet writing desks.

Scarcely was I settled when a man and woman were in the seat just behind the square pillar at my elbow. I felt, rather than saw, them, but something in the brief masculine phrase, "Will this place do?" raised my pen and my head sharply.

"Clarry, you're making a little traitor of me. Why did you come?"

"How could I help coming, dearest? I've thought about you ever since you left Portland." There was a non-committal silence for answer. "Don't say you hate the sight of me."

"I'm not always thinking of myself, Clarry. I'm still the guest of Mr. Curlew, though."

"Yes, I know I was a perfect rotter, Ettie. But surely a fellow can make up for it?"

"If you're thinking that my aunt would receive you again—I would never ask it. I wouldn't allow it"

"Of course not," promptly, but in a tone which might have indicated a quick switch of plans. "But just to be near you! If you only knew what that meant to me."

Apparently Et decided not to answer, aloud, what it did mean. But the endearment was certainly sincere enough and Clarry was painfully in earnest. "I'm a beaten man, little girl. I know it. Everything's against me, right now. I've never felt so down and out in my life. But you're not the sort, dear, to ditch a fellow when he's at his lowest?"

The pauses grew longer. Et's final reply registered Clarry's shot as almost a bull's-eye. "If you had whipped him, Clarry, I could never have forgiven you—never!"

"Are you engaged to Atwood?"

"I am not." The words were quite calm.

"Are you in love with him, then?"

The two were so close to me that I could hear what was either a sigh or a sniff. Et's words, after a moment, told which. "Don't talk nonsense, Clarry. Mr. Atwood is not the first man I ever met."

"I'll bet he's proposed to you, though. Hasn't he?"

Now there was a dangerous pause. I wondered,

wondered intensely, how she could answer, with fairness to all.

"I wouldn't think of letting him do so." I thought she lied bravely.

"Then it's all right? You'll let me follow you? I just want to know I'm near you, sweetheart. The others needn't know—"

I thought I heard a movement of resistance. "Please don't do that now, Clarry—Stop! No, not even touch me. Somebody might pass. You know I should never have consented to meet you like this."

"But, really, they needn't know anything. I'll follow your route all the way to Banff. Then we'll be seeing the same things at least. Your friends aren't suspicious and I'll never let them recognize me if you think I shouldn't. Why should they object —How can they object if— You don't love him, and after all, your people are my people, dearest. Give me a chance, Ettie, that's all I want, a chance."

Clarry had been talking rapidly, but Et was on her feet, so he paused for his answer. I bit my lip in perplexity for her. What would she say, and what, now, could she say.

"If you ask me what I think, Clarry, it would be much better to forget me until I am back home. But

if you've planned to go by Banff I expect you'll go whether I consent or not."

"Just the same you don't altogether want to stop me, dear," as the two walked away. "It pleases you just a little bit, doesn't it to—?"

I had considerable difficulty finishing my letter.

## Chapter XXXVI.

## THE OVERT ACT

IT WAS four days after Dum's return to us that I sighed myself into a painful conclusion: there was something wrong with the party. For all our good health, jubilant surface spirits and Dum's fine-spoken urbanity we were not at one. Some of the evenings brought diversion, but none of them peace. The nights no longer brought refreshment. Nobody admitted the cause, but I think each of us understood.

Dum's heart was worse than a closed book. An abrupt choke of anger came into my throat each time I recalled his declaration about never coming back twice with the same proposal. In the deep of Et's eyes, when she thought herself unobserved, I had seen the rising fires of something that left me apprehensive.

I was philosopher enough to think that, beneath the dark uncomfortable surface, things were probably muddling forward. The conditions pointed unmistakably to spontaneous combustion of some sort. The string could be drawn only so tight before breaking. I had commenced to speculate as to how it would happen—when the irresistible force should strike the immovable mass.

The day we came into Canada the heat was

intense. The frontier hamlets of Kingsgate and Eastport lie in a breezeless gut of the mountains, so narrow that a high wire barricade runs shortly from cliff to cliff. We were glad to be moving again. All afternoon we plunged and corkscrewed between the high hills till we reached the first open country at the little Canadian city of Cranbrook.

The evening was still before us. The Skipper and I had friends in the place who might be home, so we went to call. Dum found himself left with the choice of providing for Et. The athletic grounds were the attraction during the long June sun-downs, and there they decided to go.

As daylight was finally vanishing, my wife and I once more back in our rooms and quietly reading, Et rushed in upon us. Excitement was on her face and anger in her eyes as she seized first one bag and then another, emptying them very much after the fashion of a dog emptying a rabbit-hole.

"Unfeeling brute, that's what he is!" she half wept, scratching away in search of bandages, iodine and the like.

Her haste forbade recital of the whole story, but it transpired that she and Dum had been quietly coming back after the baseball game when, a block from the hotel on a side street, a carelessly driven automobile skidded the corner and struck a little dog lying in the roadway.

"The motor kept right on," she told us bitterly,

"and that poor little creature lay there on his back yelping, with three tiny feet quivering in the air. The small boy who owned him, and a woman who was passing, ran to the dog."

"What did you do?" we asked.

"At first I was too faint to stir. Then I noticed that Dum hadn't moved, so I waited another few seconds to see if he would. I love dogs and I can't stand men who don't. Oh, it hurt me all right, but it was a fine chance to test his character. I caught him looking at me, but I didn't make any suggestion —just let him think I wanted to move on.

" 'I don't suppose you feel like bothering yourself?' he said and started to walk away. I had to follow him, but if he only knew it—and I'll never, never tell him—I was just coming in here to get these things. I'm going right back.

"There was a crowd of the ball-players coming down the street, I think," she added to me as we hurried out together., "but perhaps we'll be in time to do something."

In the fading light we could see a knot of perhaps a dozen men. The injured dog was evidently being attended to, although it was difficult to get near enough to see very much. Et held my arm and I could feel hers trembling. The small boy ran up excitedly with water, and they let him in beside the doctor or whoever was acting the good samaritan. We got close enough to see that the man was already

minus his coat and vest. His shirt-sleeves were rolled high, and even his collar and tie were thrown aside as he worked steadily.

"The guy knows his job all right," said a young man in front of us, and then somebody called, "Bandage! can anybody here get a bandage?"

"I've got them. Let me in!" cried Et promptly.

In a minute she was kneeling on the ground opposite the perspiring collarless samaritan. He was almost ready to apply the splints to the small broken leg and he let the girl help him hold the dog. It was very difficult to see anything, but an acetylene bicycle lamp appeared from somewhere and the treatment went on. As the bandage was being applied, the man stopped now and then to pat the restive sufferer in the comforting way of a man who loves animals. Presently it was finished and the patient was stood tenderly on his three sound legs.

"Please can I take him home, mister?" whimpered the diminutive owner.

"All right, son," said the man on the ground, "I guess the little fellow'll do now," and he lifted his face into the light as he reached for his handkerchief.

"Dum!" cried the amazed Et, putting out her hands half believingly. Then, the next moment, she sprang across the space between them, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. "Oh, you darling old monster!"

To the accompaniment of the half-repressed snickers of admiring males, Dum got up, reached about for his various articles of clothing, took Et with one arm and me with the other and started for the hotel.

"Natural enough, I suppose," he explained as the two went upstairs ahead of me, "but I thought exactly the same thing about you."

## Chapter XXXVII.

## PAST AND FUTURE MEET TO-DAY

AN HOUR afterwards, while Dum and I strode our usual hour of dour masculine joy, atoms in the moonlight of a far-thrown circumference of sleeping mountains, little Et, alone with her thoughts and her mentor, was far spent in doubts. The gentle first aids a woman applies to a sister in distress were unavailing. "No, auntie, no! It will not come out right in the end," as the proud head lifted impetuously from the Skipper's lap while her sadly reddened eyes flashed their challenge into the face of every man who had snickered. "Nothing, now, would ever make me—Oh, I almost wish I—! Clarry at least has a heart!" She paused a moment to gain calm. "I know, dear, how you feel responsible for me, so I promise you here, solemnly and faithfully, that I will never, never do such a thing again, or allow him to do so." In her eyes there was a vengeful hope that fate might give her the chance to disallow.

Morning came. New heaven and new earth. Morning when the great red sun for the hundred millionth time peeped and glowed over the parapet of the jagged backbone of our young earth, peered and poured its sparkling effulgence into the broad

deep valleys whose mouths one by one were tilted forward to be fed and warmed.

Disappeared in very thin air the billion needle-points of dewy light on the lips of God's boundless garden of mountain flowers; awakened was the life of moving things, from the trilling cricket to the deadly-pawed grizzly; brightened became the face of smiling lakes and rushing rivers—they whose spirits are inexorably awake through history's skein of nights and days.

And so morning had come to the great valley of the Kootenay since before the first red-skinned wanderer listened to its age-old echoes, and so it will come when the granite above the bones of Ethelfrinda Dolbrook's children shall have crumbled to dust.

Eternity's shuttle paces its swift inflexible transit, carrying the weft thread of time forever athwart the warp of these vast ribs of the world. The first thoughtful touch of the awful mighty Rockies strikes numb the heart and sense, shattering the foot-rule of the brain and the barometer of the soul.

But, for the happy man and maid, Nay, nay! They will not have it so. Life is real, life is earnest. That new-born orb of day is at this moment throwing its searching silent fire upon those glorious peaks for the first time. To-morrow's and next year's curtain-rise on successive productions of this titanic drama of day do not count except as imitations of this

morning. The past is dead, the future uncreated; only to-day is real.

The valley between the great serrated walls is wide and straight. On our left rose the green-feathered sides and rounded heads of the Selkirks, while on the right—closer by, sometimes a few hundred yards away—the bare brown precipices of their younger brothers, the Rockies. All day long as we drove through this land of shining tops, lunching midway at a tiny inn called Canal Flats where the headwaters of the Kootenay and the Columbia pass one another a quarter of a mile apart.

The great wall now frowned upon us, the forbidding heights backed by unexplored wilderness of rock and snow. "Surely," one murmurs, "this awesome hode-podge can never be accessible to the civilization-proud motor car."

But yes, the wheezing die-away horseless carriage of twenty-five years ago, after prowling the cities and plains, has learned to level hills and mountains and now comes triumphantly to ride the last and vastest barrier of the created world. Until this very day only the steam-belching iron horse has cut its path through, but to-morrow two armies of panting automobiles are to meet on the crest of the continental divide, cross one another and wind down the other's tracks to the valleys beyond.

And so, this afternoon, the pleasant Windermere Valley in the lap of the everlasting hills, is stirring

and echoing to the preparations. Scarlet-coated police canter their kingly pace, motors of strange cast and colour are converging on the tiny villages of Athalmer, Invermere and Windermere, and the road is dotted with parties of gaily caparisoned Indians, mounted, afoot or by families in any wheeled vehicle from a knock-kneed buggy to the faded relic of a one-time stately family coach.

That evening, from the meadow before our delightful bungalow hotel, above the warm placid waters of Lake Windermere, we looked down upon a city of teepees. Then, on the floor of the large stockaded fort of logs, the Red Man in his paint and feathers once more has his brief hour of brilliance.

The audience (pale-faces from afar, big tyee in their respective halls of business, art and legislature) look meekly, admiringly on while braves and bucks of the Kootenays, the Shuswaps and the Flatheads go through the measured gymnastics of the Turkey Dance, the Rabbit Dance, the savage War Dance and the Search for the Lost Feather. Lastly comes the Squaw Dance. All the time the air is like something alive in the perpetual loud droning hum of the warriors, the monotonous boom of the bull-hide drums and the rattle of bells on the performers' arms and legs.

Then silence—sudden, deep and pregnant.

Chief Louis Joe turns to address the state party, including the governors of two provinces. He is

rejoiced that the distinguished visitors have admired the dances. His people have taken pleasure in performing them. It is almost the only one of their ancient pleasures left to them. He hopes that the Governors will, in their power, do away with any ban in the Indian Act against such festivals.

Then and there we see and read the Indian for the first time. The pride and dignity of his nationhood flashes across our imagination out of a far free past.

Again we are assembled. This time like two camps of sun-worshippers, face to face in the wide open brilliance of a speckless morning sky.

Four hundred Red people have already gone through a long service of religious preparation. The men, gorgeously dressed, are pictures of lordly calm, their features a cast of historic inspiration.

Again the fashionable audience—eager, mute, attentive.

The speech intoned for the ears of the Indian alone ceases. Announcement is made that the chief of the white men, the Governor of British Columbia, is present and seeks to be elected to his place amongst his brethren.

His Honor is conducted into the circle of chiefs. First he smokes the Pipe of Peace. Chief Paul Luke, headman of all the tribal bands, then takes up the ceremonial Pipe of stone, points solemnly aloft and pauses impressively.

"Look, Oh white brother! Alone in the infinity of the sky above our heads floats the beautiful sun. Its kindness and warmth came to my forefathers ages before your forefathers knew of this land. We lived here in full possession, our warriors roaming the valleys, our hunters seeking and fighting the wild beast on yonder mountains. When the first of your people came it was our people who showed them the secret and hidden places, the source of the streams, the passes through the great hills. By and by, more white people came and my people let them come and go in peace and finally to build their strange teepees and dwell in the land. And always the beneficent sun shone out of the clear sky, lessening the cold of winter, melting its snows, and in summer ripening the fruits of the earth. But for the sun, neither your people nor my people could have lived. Many men of the white people always regard the red men as savages and not wise enough to be of his people. On our side there are those old ones who will die uttering words that the white people have stolen that which was ours and that the white people will one day go away, even as they came. But always the sun in the bright sky looks on, listening to and heeding not the one nor the other. White man and red man to him are alike his little children whom he loves equally and whom he intended should live side by side in harmony. Thus it is, my brother, that the people of my tribe and the peoples of the other tribes before you look

upon your people. We will not make war upon your people, you will not make war upon the red men. As token of our friendship we receive you into our tribe and into our council as Chief Red Sky. The sky when it is red promises sunshine on the morrow. And so shall your rank be a token between us. God has willed that we possess the land together. The same sun warms and nourishes us; let us hold for one another the same love that he radiates on both equally. I have spoken."

## Chapter XXXVIII.

## THE MICE WILL PLAY

THE MOON was full that last glorious night at Windermere. The club house hummed with voices. Fresh bulletins were being posted, telegrams came in as to what was going on at the Banff end of the highway across the great wall. It was a rippling excitement, a sort of hot spring gently bubbling.

That morning I had seen Clarry. As though to justify his cocksureness in being able to evade us, it had taken me an hour to recognize him. Opposite us in the wide circle around Chief Paul Luke had stood a man carrying a stick, wearing a broad-brimmed panama hat, clothes almost humorously unrelated to Mr. Wentworth of Sacramento or Portland, and a dark moustache—decidedly a creditable moustache for less than a fortnight. It was Et's frequent glance and his bored way of handling a cigarette that betrayed him.

Clarry was doubtless at the hotel across in the village of Invermere; I was fairly sure he had not

been there yesterday, also that he had not yet spoken to my niece. But he was almost sure to take advantage of the crowds to-night to do so.

"The manager is taking us out to show us something," Et called back to us from a knot of people near the door. "Aren't you coming?"

I was not surprised when Dum decided to stay behind. He had been that way of late. After the excitement of the celebrations, Et had fallen to brooding that she ought not to forgive him the humiliating incident at Cranbrook. She had spent the afternoon alone, writing letters; the Skipper went to the village alone; I went bathing alone. We had never been so nearly out of joint before.

As the party of twenty or thirty of us stood, a few minutes later, around a small ancient excavation, I wished for a moment that Dum was back at home. Clarry's almost professional love-making I did not like, but in contrast to Dum's exasperating pig-headedness it seemed forgivable.

"This is the site of the original fort," began our conductor in impressive voice. "Thompson, the first white man to find his way through these mountains, arrived on this spot a hundred and sixteen years ago to-morrow. That stockade glorification on the point there, called the David Thompson Memorial, was built only last year."

"One hundred and sixteen years ago!" echoed half a dozen voices, while the conductor, from pointing

into the ruined cellar, waved his hand up at the all-surrounding vastness of hills, impregnable and terrible-looking even in the soft moonlight.

"One man—led the way through all that trackless jumble—one hundred and sixteen years ago." It sounded almost weirdly impressive when he added in a lower voice, "I wonder whom those snow-caps will be looking down upon one hundred and sixteen years from to-night."

Et was standing several paces away from us, in the circle. I saw a wide-brimmed panama appear behind her. At a touch she looked up, and soon one hand stole behind her back. At the final mention of a hundred and sixteen years she turned her face around to Clarry. Under the mystic moon her cameolike features seemed to shine in sympathy and forgiveness. The girl was fond of Clarry; my stupid confidence in Dum had blinded me to it. Flashing across my mind in that moment came all the hopes and foolish dreams I had entertained for her, and, with a pang and hot regretful blush, I knew that I loved that small beautiful face as the face of my own child.

Clarry's hat and stubbly lip added age, and what Clarry needed was age. People commenced to move away, in pairs and groups. When I looked again, Clarry was gone. What wonder was it, I told myself boldly, that also there had followed the sound of his adoring voice the honest-hearted girl who, for my

friend, had relented in vain, been humiliated in vain and was at her patience end.

"Et seems to have gone," whispered the Skipper. "Do you think it's all right?"

"Yes, I wouldn't worry the least bit about it," I smiled. But, even with my own last word, there came a little breath-shortening sense of risk and fear. Was it perhaps, I examined myself, merely annoyance with Dum—annoyance which had piled up against him for a week—which permitted my toleration of Clarry, my sympathy and even admiration for him? I was unable to muster up further assurance for the Skipper. To allay my own anxiety I kept murmuring Clarry's own words, "After all, my people are your people," but it did not prevent me inwardly fussing like a mother hen that our niece failed to return.

These curious misgivings, however, took flight when, an hour later, the runaway strolled around to us from the north verandah with the truthful, but restrictive, observation that she had been talking with some friends. Certainly she was in happy overflowing vein once more. In spite of her effort to conceal it, the similarity of her humour to that of her first night of Clarry in Sacramento was there.

Presently the two ladies disappeared in the direction of their bungalow and from force of habit I turned to Dum, "Shall we take our little nightcap stroll."

As we walked across the golf links on the plateau above the shining surface of Lake Windermere, his good-natured nothings seemed to irritate me, the continual withholding of his confidence struck a sullen note. For relief, I turned to the probable thoughts of another pair of humans who had trodden this grass an hour ago. But to my friend that night, I told nothing.

## Chapter XXXIX.

## OVER THE TOP

MY FIRST recollection of the great day was a series of explosions on Market Street, San Francisco, which, however, on waking thought turned out to be Dum thumping the bungalow door.

"Get a hustle on if you're going over the top today," he was calling.

In all our summer's wanderings there was nothing to prepare us for what was ahead. Our nerves were drawn taut in delicious speculation. It was perhaps as well that we could not realize all of the beforeground. The mountains immediately in sight were the Brisco wing of the Beaverfoot Range. Behind

them lay the Mitchell Range, the Ottertail Range, the Vermillion Range and finally the Bow Range—which is the continental divide.

As our long procession of cars got within speaking distance, the great wall became a precipice; gray and impossible. Until, on a quick turn, we beheld a miraculous pillar of blue sky, its base almost at our feet. By some amazing accident of creation, the garden gate had been left open. Sinclair Gap gently received us.

From the outer valley the stately mountain crests had seemed to be turned in our direction—scornfully, appraisingly it may have been, but still acknowledging our existence. Now that we were come, full of fiery ambition and curiosity and were touching one of the giant's feet, his proud unyielding brow was lost in the upper air, facing unchangeably a changing world. An ant at the castle moat was greater then we.

Laboriously but swiftly we rose, always on a perfect road, until we seemed to be even with the mountain's breasts, and there looking about, we beheld before us—behind us, above us and below us—in awful disarray, the petrified wreckage of the world's wrath in an earlier age. On across the vast amphitheatre, more and more pinnacles rose in amazing panorama—an endless host, the grotesque, colossal candle-tops of the high Rockies.

The sharp abutting horn of Assinaboine passed

dimly by forty miles to the south, Goodsir's triple peaks far to the north.

Then, all at once, the music of a band, an open space, lines of gay streamers and a red-coated Mounted Policeman was assigning us a parking space amongst hundreds of cooling motor-cars. The Windermere army had met the far larger Banff army at the appointed spot. Eagerly, conceitedly we hop to the ground. The army of the West shakes hands with the army of the East, fervently like men whose picks meet in a famous tunnel. To-morrow we will read about the meeting of Stanley and Livingstone with a new thrill. The great work is an accomplished fact. We've done it!

Presently bugles cut the air and the great men file up into their nest of bunting. The premiers, the cabinet ministers and the foreign dignitaries talk. The surrounding hills lend dignified attention, while the others of us leisurely discover that the close-up study of mankind is a humourous pursuit.

Everybody is wearing what he or she fancies to be the correct dress for history-making. There are palm beach suits and mackinaws, morning coats, leather coats, rubber coats, corduroy coats and no coats at all. There are famous editors and authors who boast that they don't care how they look—and who are believed. There are hard-working artists and photographers who, as Dum Atwood remarks, should be eternally thankful that they are not their

own subjects. Et and the Skipper are hypnotized by a stout intrepid Quixot-ess of some sixty summers who has painstakingly borrowed a pair of high lumbermen's boots to go with her beaded georgette waist and picture hat with flowing veil, and who suffers heroically in a pair of her husband's tweed knickers, the over-the-skirt blouse in this case being an over-the-trousers blouse. But what of that; is it not a moment when traditions are in the mould?

Like other tiresome things of life, the speeches serve really a most useful purpose. And certainly the final flourish impresses all hearts.

As the bugles sound their warning for the great moment, a massed rush is made on the remaining section of virgin road. By dint of backing their well-trained animals into the surging crowd the Mounted Police clear a space between the standards floating the flags of the sister countries. There follows a magic hush; all hats come off; the Banff-Windermere Highway is solemnly dedicated to the motorists of America; the governors cut the silken ribbons; the formal passage of the first car takes place and the hills reverberate to a shout such as the top of the world knew not before.

Since my discovery of him in Spokane, there had been no need to guess as to Clarry's whereabouts; Et's manner would readily betray it. That he was present at the road-opening was fairly certain, but

Et's careless eyes and laugh indicated with equal certainty that he would not appear.

A couple of hours later we halted, as other cars were doing, to gaze up the half-mile cliff at the whirling snow on the ten-thousand-foot summit of Storm Mountain. Et's face became unaccountably serious as we were about to move on. She had caught sight of Clarry in one of the parked cars behind us. I was not quick enough to find him, but I knew he was there.

Some miles beyond the Great Divide we passed a lonely cabin, a hat and a red coat hanging on the wall, a basin, soap and the officer's riding boots on a bench beneath. The clean-limbed "Mountie" came out, his bright-coloured braces and stockinged heels indicating his domestic plans for the night.

"Queer sort of life—that chap," I remarked some minutes later, "wonder what he does after dark?"

My niece was sitting with me in the back seat. "That's just what I was wondering," turning for the fifth time as though yearningly interested in the policeman. This time, for some reason, I turned with her and one careful glance exposed the humbug of it. Overhauling us was a long touring car, in the front seat, and only suggestively discernible, a familiar looking panama.

"Yes, it's fine to be admired on parade," I contributed to the deception, "but oh, you long nights in the hills!"

"But surely, uncle," another look back toward an imaginary hero, "he doesn't have to be there quite by himself, permanently?"

"That's the tradition of the Mounted Police, Et. No matter how far, how lonely or how dangerous—one man."

"But when he gets back at night—or at daybreak or from whatever's been keeping him—when he gets home—Does he call it home, do you think?"

"I daresay he dreams of another kind of home, little girl, but, as it is, he probably 'washes up', cooks himself something, reads last week's paper and then smokes on the bench till he gets sleepy."

"And never a soul to appreciate him!" Et sighed convincingly. "Do you think he'd like me to cook something for him?" The touring car roared past, Clarry boldly waving his hand. My teeth gritted in solicitude. I wanted to shout, "Change that hat; it's commencing to look suspiciously familiar."

From the driver's seat Dum turned round, grinning his entertainment—his purely brotherly interest—at the Mountie worship. It was my own fault that I expected a glimpse of the green-eyed monster instead of a boyish smile. Nevertheless his refusal to evidence a little dudgeon I felt as a personal affront. As Et's eyes followed his turning away, they gleamed a sly sarcasm which gave me an atom of satisfaction, even though it looked like coquetting.

Dusk had gathered as we reached the flat. An

hour later the street lamps of Banff glowed with sharp pin-head artificiality as we sped through, and up the incline of Sulphur Mountain to a great hotel which stands out from the dark sweep of virgin forest.

Among the dancers that evening was another handsome uniform, for whom Et's eyes had a little adoration left.

"Perhaps you want Sir Gold Braid introduced?" I heard Dum in mocking undertone, as the music stopped.

"Oh, dear, no! I only love them in the wilderness. A uniform in the bush is worth two in the hand."

"Even so," appraising her charming evening dress and white arms with a supercilious smile, "you've got the weapons to hunt them."

"Wouldn't I love to," the large eyes danced. "I suppose any other hot-house woman out in the wilds is the same, looking for adventure like a country deacon on his semi-annual buying trip." Et was following her little habit of tossing up stray curls, but she watched Dum in swift little glances.

"Say! That's quite an easy balm to the conscience. I believe I'll try it—"

"No, no! Good fun for me, but I wouldn't stand for your doing it! Not for a minute!"

He turned quickly, ready with a witty reply, but met her look, challenging, unflickering, audaciously amused. Just a second or two he stood it, then

regarded the floor in pretended amusement. Patently the part he played did not provide for this.

When the orchestra folded away its music, Et coaxed us all out to the terrace. I had been watching for a preoccupied look and an excuse to absent herself, but evidently she had no appointment as yet. There was a stimulating midnight tang to the outdoors that seemed for a moment to be open only at the top. A swimming pool lay below us like a huge coin, shining under a moon two days past the full.

Et had somehow manœuvred Dum out to the edge of the terrace. Every now and then the girl lifted or dropped her head in merriment at something she had heard or said, or tapped a thoughtful slipper on the pebbles. Her hands showed almost phosporescently white from under the bright red cloak which she held about her thinly-covered shoulders, her laughing face half buried in the huge fur trimming. I found myself searching for a phrase to describe this breathing miniature in the cold ivory light, when the Skipper whispered spontaneously,

"How in the world can he resist her?"

Lighting a cigarette, I remarked carelessly that we should be going.

We met the others on the way in and Et announced surprisingly, "All of you off to bed! I've bought some post-cards and want a half hour to myself."

I gave the proposal my vote and influence, then, a

minute later, I felt again that childish prompting to be afraid lest I had done wrong.

With the Skipper and Dum walking a few steps ahead, we passed some glass cases of curios. A figure apparently studying them with great care was in reality covertly watching us away. To my trained eye it was none other than Clarence A. Wentworth.

Most certainly Et was doing some coquetting.

## Chapter XL.

## WATCHING A GAME OF SOLITAIRE

AT AN uninterestingly early hour Dum and I were out of bed and had our dewy walk together. Back at the hotel by eight o'clock and sitting to face the driveway we were attracted by clattering hoofs. A party of half a dozen dismounted and to our astonishment the smallest figure in the group tossed her bridle reins to one side and turned on us the face of Ethelfrinda Dolbrook.

"I'm setting you spoiled Canadians an example of loyalty. This is Dominion Day, my first Canadian holiday."

Tripping ahead of us in the curious riding habit, there was something fugitively unfamiliar about this girl, all at once mannish yet magnetically feminine.

"Oh! Don't bother me about where I got it! Or where I learned to ride, or anything," as we sat down to breakfast. "I just want to do everything there is to do in this delectable country. It's got into my lungs and veins. 'This is my own, my native land.' "

"As bad as that, Et?" and we looked at one another smiling slyly.

"Yes, I know," she caught us quickly, "I used that quotation once before—in a nasty sense—but I didn't know my country then."

"Which is that, Miss Dolbrook?" Dum spoke mischievously. "What is your country?"

"Why, this one, of course. From Boston to Vancouver, and from Mexico to the home of the musk-ox. Oh, I'm not interested in that black line running the wrong way of the mountains—the one across which," and her excited cheeks dimpled roguishly, "you and uncle Joe smuggled the cigars. I'm glad—glad that the same country stretches from East to West. It would be horrid to come out here where people and people's hearts are exactly the same and have to feel that you were in a foreign place. You'll agree with me, uncle Joe, won't you?" She took my hand under both hers in a compelling way. "The East has what the West needs and the West has what the East needs. Oh, I'm a political economist, I am! But, honestly, I never thought I could learn to love places like I do. I love the West, and I only want— I only wish it wanted me."

At this guileless *faux pas* there was an instantaneous attempt by the Skipper to change the subject. Et dropped her head a little confusedly and we made way for four half grape fruits.

And so it went, through the night and day hours.

By this time none of us felt quite in possession of the assurance of any other one. For my part, though Dum was as mulishly behind a screen as ever, I found myself at moments frowning on the lurking Clarry. Time had made me question the readiness with which he had chosen to be a Man-in-the-iron-mask. His clandestine meetings with Et somehow lacked ingenuousness. Full of crowds and variety as were our days now, opportunities were frequent. Even I whose vision was clear could not tell how frequent.

Our plans called for the final motor run to Lake Louise on Wednesday, July third. The following day the car would be handed over for shipment to Vancouver and we would go on by train. Thus in a few days Clarry's innings, whatever it was yielding him, would be over. It did not seem possible he would try to continue his game beyond that. To balk him scarcely appealed to me as sporting.

But I watched him. There were twenty-four hours a day in which to do it. He managed to be very inconspicuous and, without fore-knowledge, I should never have discovered him. Especially he avoided making acquaintances. But, Tuesday morning, I saw him in deep conversation with a tourist whose identity I took pains to establish—a Mr. Rexham, produce broker of Hartford. More than once or twice they consulted. I had the conviction the subject was no chance one. Then, on Tuesday

evening, Clarry went away. His non-appearance suggested it, and Et's unrestrained manner was full confirmation. All at once she had no preference as to how we spent the hours, she was glad to fit in anywhere, found no excuses for leaving us.

On Wednesday morning I sought the vacant chair next to Mr. Rexham on the terrace. Between the paragraphs of my reading we exchanged some pleasant remarks. In a quarter of an hour, we were on terms of jolly friendship.

Yes, he intended visiting Lake Louise, but not for a few days. His wife had gone on the Mount Assinaboine walking tour for the week, and, "The fact is, I won't have my car for a while." No, it wasn't exactly laid up; he had lent it to a young fellow who had just this spring graduated from college with his nephew. Mr. Rexham smiled wisely each time he referred to it and I endeavoured to listen irresistibly.

"The fact is," with good-natured resignation to the necessity for telling somebody, "it's a sort of little romance being staged out here. My young friend has followed his sweetheart from Boston. The girl's a daughter of one of our big doctors there. The whole thing's quite all right, you know. Anyhow, I'm only facilitating matters in a small way."

A polite interest seemed called for, so I enquired, "Yes, of course. I suppose they've told you where the elopement is taking place?"

"Sure! Right over at this Lake Louise place, I understand. The fact is, my friend beat it away in my car last night. He expects the party the girl's with to arrive there some time to-day."

"I should think the trouble would be to find a place to elope to." I registered innocent curiosity. "There aren't any towns in this part of the map, are there—except back to Banff here?"

"Oh, that don't worry my young friend. He intends to drive right through here and on to this Calgary place." Mr. Rexham enjoyed telling about it once he started. "Quite makes a man feel young again, don't it?" he concluded, almost hugging himself in pleased importance.

"Yes, don't it, though?" I repeated.

"The fact is—" But I was already choking with facts.

"Elopement!" I echoed myself a few minutes later, walking briskly towards the town of Banff, about a mile away. It was comparatively easy to find the office where marriage licenses were issued, but rather harder, though not impossible, to get information.

"Yes, that was his name all right, Wentworth," the man admitted. "The girl? No, she didn't come in with him, but both the parties were United States citizens, neither one separated or divorced or anything, so there wasn't much trouble about it."

It was four o'clock when we flopped once more on

the well-used cushions and somebody remarked that it was to be the last drive of our holiday together.

"Come, Et, m'dear," I drew her into the front seat with me, "do you realize that our wanderings are coming to an end?"

"Yes, uncle, I know it." In a moment the voice was sad. In her it was the kind of sadness which prompts a man to clear his throat surreptitiously and instantly to become confidential.

"And your own last ride through the mountains?'

"Ye-es!" The word came with difficulty as though accusing me of trying to make her cry.

"Your very last, little girl?" I turned and looked at her searchingly.

"Why, yes—of course!"

The tears were up. Her black velvet eyes were swimming in a weak consternation that I should be so cruel as to rub it in. Either she did not know what I knew or she was a most skilful liar. But I was not going to be victimized.

"You wouldn't have secrets, Et—from me?"

"Uncle Joe! I'd tell you a secret before anybody else in the world. It's only that—well, I'm going to have a long talk with you—to-morrow, I think."

Retracing our route along the Bow a while, we turned aside up the wonderful road to Moraine Lake for a glimpse at the Valley of the Ten Peaks. The summits ploughed through a plane of scudding blue-gray cloud.

When we drove up the hill to Lake Louise, bright light streamed from the chateau building. Otherwise the face of the deep and the steep alike was buried behind the clouds, now low and black, if indeed low clouds can overtop a lake itself fifty-seven hundred feet altitude.

Settling the Skipper and Et in their rooms, I came downstairs and smoked with Dum. Before the snapping cores of a heap of pine-logs we were silent a while. A new flame suddenly crept up from one of the glowing sticks, while in the chimney a faint sound like a bellows. The whole fire stirred breathingly to life. The mountain wind was coming up. Outside, everything was black. I had just made up my mind how to begin.

"Dum, old pal, I'm going to talk plainly about—"

An agitated hand fell on my arm and I looked up at my wife, an unfolded sheet of paper and its envelope in her fingers.

"Daddy, look! What'll I do? This letter was on the floor. Et was lying down, so I left her and came into the other room and found this near my dresser. I suppose it had been shot under the door across the polished floor, but, of course, I thought Et had brushed it off the writing-table. It was open —I'm quite sure it was—but it was supposed to be sealed. Look!" She pressed the envelope under my eyes, "It's an old one with the gum gone hard and curled. He was in a hurry, I suppose, licked it

and then thumped it down, but it sort of warped open before it could dry."

"You've read it?" I enquired, suspecting Clarry's handwriting the moment I saw it.

"Yes, that's the awful part. She's told me always to read her letters. She reads all mine." I tried to be casual as the Skipper was quite bewildered. "You didn't have any idea Clarry was here, did you?"

Dum had been affecting the disinterested bystander, but now he wheeled to face us and, to my secret joy, a really terrible cloud covered his surprised features. Fight showed gloriously through his alarm.

"Oh, yes! I knew it." My measured tones helped the Skipper. "Let me see the letter." She hesitated, but I quietly took it.

*Loveliest Girl,—*

*I've just watched you come in. All day I've done nothing but sit here and long for your sweet face. I'm almost crazy when I think that only to-morrow you'll be gone. Gone out of my life, sweetheart, think of that. They'll badger you into marrying somebody out here, I know it.*

*But listen, darling. Will you do me one last favor? I'd die for you—you know that. I've borrowed a car and I want to take you out for a little run. I'll be watching the dining-room door when you come out. Get away and come right through to where all the cars are parked. Nobody drives here at night, but I'll have a warm coat for you and we'll steal an hour.*

*Remember, Ettie, it's the last request of the man who will always love you. After that it may be farewell—forever.* *C.*

*Mrs. Curlew will be settled in her room now. Will slip this under door 129, which I see is yours.*

Moistening the seal carefully, I closed the flap on Clarry's note and pressed it a while.

"What shall we do?" cried my wife.

My leisureliness was oppressive to her. "Try slipping it under 127," I smiled.

"But, daddy! If she goes with him?"

"I hope she does. Et means to be soft-hearted but she's got to have her lesson."

"You can't mean it! I won't permit—"

"Mother," I whispered. "What I ask is best. If you forbid her she's liable to go anyway. Clarry's weaving the rope that's going to hang him to-night. I tell you I know. If Dum doesn't go after them and bring her back, I will." Then aloud, "Get this in to Et at once. When you think she's read it, go in and bring her down to dinner."

We watched her hurry away.

"Well, John Kemp Atwood, what are you going to do about it? This fellow Wentworth has a marriage license in his pocket."

"Does she know it?"

"You bet she doesn't."

"And they're going to elope?—if he can coax her?"

The word in my mind was not so pretty as coax, but I merely nodded and tapped my foot as irritatingly as I could. "Either your affections are a great deal shallower than you are, old friend, or you've deliberately chosen lately to give Et a pretty rotten time." Dum shot me a look that I must describe as

bellicose. "But the matter of this Clarry—you know, he and you—"

"Yes, I get you all right. And I damn well allow that he's my affair! She once called me to defend her from that sarcastic fop. She won't have to call me this time."

"Then, you're going along with them?" Not altogether successfully I fought against smiling. "He intends to take her to Calgary. It's a hundred and ten miles."

"I'll stay with him, Joe, if it's from here to hell. I'll be one of the witnesses at the wedding, anyway."

His assuming that the whole thing was his business exclusively, quite warmed my heart to him again.

"Come on!" he commanded. "We'll get the lay of the land and see if we can give Mr. Algernon Slim Wentworth a hustle for his money. Too bad your car's not a little speedier."

There was only one Connecticut car in the line-up and Dum looked it over shrewdly. Then he walked along the line and selected a small trimly-appointed roadster. But it wouldn't start: the owner had foolishly locked it.

"Darn silly practice, around here!" Dum muttered, tumbling out to look for an unlocked one. "Who'd be fool enough to steal a car up in a pudding-bag place like this, with only one road in the world to get out by?"

I grinned broadly in the half darkness. Dum was

so deadly in earnest that humour might smite him and not be felt.

"This one'll make it," as he spun the starter of a low rakish-looking coupe bearing an Idaho license. Testing its gears, he manœuvred the car back out of the ranks until its headlights rested on Clarry's roadster. After noting unmistakably what it looked like he ran the "borrowed" coupe back to its place and measured the gas supply.

"All set!" he finished, marching me back to the bright lights. "Don't forget, you may have to go my bail."

Dinner that evening was just a rippling polite sort of nightmare. We were so afraid to look in Et's direction that she must have grown suspicious, were it not that her thoughts were too anxious and, I thought, unhappy, to notice anything. Dum managed to lift the conversation over its difficult spots. In the intervals, and behind his engaging smile, he was thinking profoundly. Through his eyes I could fancy I saw the plans being sewn together. I had greater faith in him every minute. As a rule I do not spoil my wife by sympathy, but certainly on this occasion the Skipper had need of all I possessed. She was distressfully, unnaturally and mystifiedly, uncomfortable.

At last we got up, walked down the long line of tables and through the wide doorway into full view

of the thronged spaces. It was like rehearsing a drama—before a full audience.

"Oh auntie, I must run! I've got something to do. Don't worry! I'll be back later." It was well planned, if perhaps a trifle nervously said. We all looked after Et as though she had been a vanishing spirit.

"Just wait here. I'll be back to you in five minutes," I turned to the Skipper. "And I'll tell you all about it."

Dum led me by a direct door out to the gravel of the front terrace. It was somewhat of a walk, or seemed so. In the high wind the sky was now naked of clouds. At last we looked down on the parking area. Et must have hurried for she was just climbing in. At the height of his triumph Clarry could afford to be off guard. We heard his voice plainly, though the responses were inaudible. At the final gear-change and as the tail-light pinched out to nothing around the curve, I felt a sick misgiving.

When Dum is in action he has no place for fear, fire or foul weather. A minute later he had turned his car with one backward swing and was ready. Both the windows were open and the breeze flapped

the wide collar of his light coat against his jaw during the time he stopped to talk to me. I watched this more or less regular hitting against his face. I do not know why such a small thing fascinated me, but it did. Then the car jumped forward. As his rear red glass described the same gliding arc and disappeared down the creek, I discovered the attraction of the flapping collar. It was the rigidity of the jaw against which it struck.

## Chapter XLI.

## COBWEB AND CANNON-BALL

EVENTUALLY the ragged sections of evidence came together and I completed the jig-saw puzzle picture.

Dum was longer than he expected in overhauling the Rexham car. Clarry did not care how many hours Calgary might be, but he wanted to get a long way from Lake Louise in a short time. He drove like the wind, and said it was "The exhilaration of happiness," "The wine of the joy of living."

Adown one of the noblest avenues on earth they sped. The rebellious waters of the Bow were swirling alongside, the late-rising moon now looking over the iron-black palings of the Sawback Range. Mount Temple's twelve-thousand-foot cone of snow rose with lordly condescension to watch the two pin-pricks of red light in the game of hide and seek and swimming from side to side far along the valley. At this time of night the curling gray road was bare of traffic.

It was nearly eleven when the two cars, less than a hundred yards apart, rolled into Banff. The bustle of the summer evening was fast subsiding. Et's idea of a "little run" had been stretched far beyond her common sense. Even the lightly-given promise of "home by midnight easy!" was not altogether reassuring. But, when she did get back,

she promised herself she would at once tell her aunt and uncle all about it, of how it was a last concession to an old friend who suffered—and who was now probably gone forever.

Clarry had talked about marriage, which was to be expected. She had not even troubled to tell him that the past few weeks and months had altered her view of life and the world, and that thought of marriage was a long, long way off. But Clarry had talked a great deal about marriage. Marriage was a thing she'd have to think about soon, surely. Girls were marrying younger; some of them, she must have noticed, quite a lot younger than she was even. Then, the next minute, getting married was just a simple thing anyway. The old-fashioned notion of wasting months thinking about it was more or less absurd, because people forgot, afterwards, all about their misgivings. Those who made practical, sensible matches were always happy: a girl couldn't live happily away from all her friends perhaps, maybe in a place where there wasn't much going on, or with a husband that worked so hard he'd never been used to having any fun and sulked 'round mostly.

"Take you and me, now. I'll work some, but you'd always have your own money to do with as you liked and have lots of fun."

"We mustn't spend any time here in Banff, Clarry," she urged. "Not a minute. They'll all be worried—"

Clarry was turning corners; diagonally behind a gas station, up a back street, into and out of a blind lane he turned. "We should have taken that last street, I guess," and he veered forthwith towards the edge of the town again. "At night a road's so liable to look different going back."

Just where the street narrowed into the highroad, another car shot ahead, enveloping itself in dust. Its flight startled Et and Clarry as it skidded dangerously in the gravel and took the middle of the road again.

"Where are you going, Clarry? I'm sure this is wrong." Et was now counting the minutes of delay and worrying about her aunt sitting up.

"I'm not sure, but I think this joins the Lake Louise road in a few minutes. That fellow ahead seems to know where he's going."

"Couldn't we drive a little faster? It looks good enough."

"No, I never take chances on a road that's new to me, at night."

It may have been ten miles along the Calgary road that Clarry pulled up. Just where the highway upgraded and narrowed at a little bluff was a coupe half turned across the grade, leaving a space on either side too narrow for another car. After much heedless tooting, Clarry got out and walked ahead to see about getting by. "Holy smoke! What a place to jack up a car and then go away and leave it." Several

tools lay convincingly in the dust nearby. Clarry returned to Et for a moment.

"I'm going to start up that car and let the back wheels push the front of it off the road somehow."

"But their car'll be damaged."

"Serve them right for going away, and leaving a thing like that."

"But, Clarry, I'm almost sure we're on the wrong road. See the moon! It should be on that side."

Clarry started again towards the obstructing car, stopped, considered a second, then strode boldly back to his own car door. An unseen figure watched and listened from the shrubbery ten feet away.

"Yes, Et, we are! Not on the wrong road, but the Calgary road. You're eloping with me. A telegram first thing in the morning will advise Mrs. Curlew that we're married. See, here's the marriage license all in good order, and I know how to drive straight to a minister's who'll marry us any hour we get there."

No voice came out of the darkness to accuse him of joking. Ever since she had discovered the true womanhood in herself, Et knew that this man was something she could see through in a moment if she chose. But she had not chosen. Clarry constituted the adventure her surroundings and romantic mood demanded. Getting rid of him would have been unpleasant—possibly unfair—probably unnecessary. The subconscious feeling that he was a fawning

creature of uncertainty had been smothered under old associations. Now she faced it. There was just an audible gasp.

"You—you have planned all this, ahead?"

"Yes. What you need, dearest, is a master." Silence. "It's all right—we're going on?"

"Turn this car around and drive me home as fast as you can go, safely."

The man sitting up on the bank could hear every word. He perceived that Clarry was prepared for anything; his calmness betrayed him. Leisure, not hurry, was the order of the night. Ceremoniously his watch was withdrawn, ceremoniously the stem was pressed and the cover sprung back. Clarry's little finger rocked it back and forward several times calculatingly. He had languidly bent over to hold the open face under the dash light. Presently he began to speak.

"By the right time it is now fourteen minutes to twelve. If we drove back to the Chateau—which would be absurd—we would get there—Oh, about three o'clock. If we drove on to Calgary—where we're heading, and the first half of which you have come so willingly and nicely. Remember that! —we could make it perhaps a little earlier and be married, respectably."

"Clarry, if you threaten to kill me I'd never marry you. Can't you see—"

"Or," in a silencing voice, somewhat bored, "if

my pretty prisoner suddenly decided to object at this point—. Well, I suppose it won't be a very jolly night, but some of our friends, amongst themselves, may insist that it was. Or," another mock sigh, "perhaps she will refuse to go on and we'll have to stay right here until morning. That would make a good story: pleasure jaunt in the middle of the night—accident on road ten miles from town—too risky to turn back—had to wait for help. But," Clarry was now the sarcastic prosecuting attorney summing up against the prisoner, "unfortunately there was a marriage license issued—will be published in the Calgary papers to-morrow—and the Boston correspondent is naturally interested." Sensation, at this moment, sounded better than facts.

"I'm not going to beg you, Clarry; I'm not fool enough to threaten. I won't even cry. If there's any man in you—"

"Look here, Ettie, tell me this! Is it that sneaking Atwood? He hasn't got brains enough to want a girl like you. He's only a grubbing business man. And, at that, he's laughing at you. I know it. You'd never have bothered with me again if he hadn't made a fool of you. For God's sake, remember your pride." A considerable pause, then soothingly, "Come, sweetheart! It'll be the greatest adventure of our lives. We'll be the most popular and talked-about couple in the city—long before we get home."

The other voice came weaker, and tardily.

"I told you I shouldn't cry. But— I don't love you, Clarry. I don't love you."

"Then I'll make you, Et!" Clarry stepped fiercely over to the door. The man waiting on the bank had come down. He stood, one steadying hand on the car, not three feet from the pair. The seconds were an age in wearing to a close. Of course, she would not surrender. Dum felt sure she would not. Yet, with his right hand rigid as a mailed fist, he waited—waited to be positive.

There was a sudden convulsive snatching away, a little angry cry and a thud, a blow. Clarry's head reeled backwards a moment, and Dum fastened on the coat and the linen collar together. There were no Marquis of Queensbury rules to-night. In three seconds Clarry was being savagely dragged clear of the car.

"Who's that! Who is it, I say?" Et screamed at last. "Step into the light there in front whoever you are. Oh, Dum!" A pause of conscious shame and shyness. "He's been—" She stopped, ready to be hysterical.

"I know better than you what he's been." The

voice suggested a terrible rage. "What do you want me to do? Is there any use thrashing him?"

"Oh-h! No, no! Just—just take me home, Mr. Atwood."

It was past two o'clock when Dum brought her in. Et cast herself into her aunt's arms and was borne off to bed. With almost business-like precision Dum reported to me what had happened, then was silent. Nearly all the lights had been turned off, the fire was nothing but embers. I do not know how long we sat—our thoughts probably went visiting in various directions—till he spoke.

"Say, Joe! That little girl thinks I have given her a raw deal."

"Did she say so?"

"No. But you did, and that skunk Wentworth did, and she didn't deny it."

Dum lifted an appealing face to me. He had probably never appealed to anybody in his life. He was inviting some protest in his defense, but I dealt him a level look and a nod or two—slowly—just sufficient. At length he turned, dull-eyed, to one side and drew his fingers across his forehead. Trans-

lated into the emotion of an ordinary man, this was equal to a breakdown with tears.

"Did you find any opportunity to speak to her on the way up?" My serious look was still on him.

"Well! ! Not exactly!" There was surprise, almost scorn, for my taste. "When she had just been—"

"Rescued!" I offered.

"For heaven's sake, Joe, shut up on that stuff."

"Are you going to ask her to marry you? You know, temporarily, I'm her guar—"

"Do you think that consideration would influence us a bit?" I almost wished I had waited a little more patiently. "Only you see, Joe, it's a matter of principle with me. I never could bring myself to ask for a thing the second time, and I hate—"

"Yes, I know all about that. But, if I remember, it was your principle in the first place to leave her alone altogether. What happened to that principle? Or do we all have bogies?"

He raised himself slowly, comprehendingly, to look at me. I saw that my shot had gone home.

"Joe, if that little girl doesn't want me—you can

begin counting ten over me." He turned to look into the dead embers of the fire-place, then up into the ceiling corners as though, now, he wished I would go. "She's promised, in the morning, to go for a long climb with me."

"Good-night then, old chap. Sound sleep. I'm getting up early myself."

## Chapter XLII.

## THE FOURTH OF JULY

FAR BACK in the nebular beginning of that first magic morning at Lake Louise, my sinews must have twitched in their effort to stir the brain into waking life, for when at last my eyes opened, inspired legs sprang me to the floor. Every muscle was aquiver and athrill in the presence, the electrifying thraldom of those mighty precipices, whose ten thousand-foot rim combs the clouds, winnows the first shafts of day, and throws into the great bowl a silent avalanche of dawn.

I intended to steal unobtrusively out into the crystal stillness of the embryo day, to stand solitary in the bottom of that painted cup of creation. But, at the foot of the darkened staircase, my steps and

my breath paused simultaneously. In the great central room the architect has placed a window, a single expanse of flawless glass. Through this uncurtained surface was now exposed a picture of the outside world, a picture of silencing, paralyzing grandeur. First were the three lawns and thick rows of many-coloured poppies, and beyond them a wide bridle-path like a ring of ebony circling a polished expanse in which green light ebbed and flowed, vanished and reappeared again, slyly, swiftly, yet all imperceptibly in obedience to some invisible wand.

The further shores were not shores but walls, walls upon which the chief mural artists of the Creator worked unceasingly for centuries until the Master, seeing their form and colour bulk and blend into wild untameable harmony, bade the painters dip their brushes into their varnish pots and so preserve the picture under a transparent film for the eyes of people and ages yet unborn.

Somewhere behind me the night clerk rustled paper. From an undefined point in the vastness of the portrait came the twittering of a bird. It caused me to look up, up to where the snow of mid-summer lay deeper and bluer, where the rugged heads of Lefroy and Victoria lay buried in the pressed-down pack of thirty years.

Lost thus in my green-and-white study, I was startled when a pair of cool little hands clapped themselves across my eyes.

"Guess who?" whispered a soft confidential voice, and in another moment Et was on the broad arm of my chair, her cheek laid on the crown of my head and her arm around me in a quick hug of pleasure at discovering me. On a sudden the calm of my mind, so in keeping with the picture, became oddly at variance with it. A good nurse, noting my pulse and respiration, must have flown for the doctor. I was too well pleased to stir myself to an explanation of the bubbles of indistinct memory stirred up within me by the gentle hand that was lifting mine caressingly.

"This is the Fourth of July, uncle," she exclaimed eagerly as though uttering a great secret, and in truth I believe it was a secret she had lately discovered. "As an American citizen I am up early, for all day, and looking for a patriotic affinity. You're the nearest I know, old thing, so I swoop upon you like a carrier pigeon on its cote."

"Was it Independence Day that got you out of bed so early?" I asked, smiling a fresh and sudden curiosity.

"Partly!" She tried to say it easily, but a slight movement as she sat, still close to me, betrayed an otherwise successfully concealed sigh.

"Look, now!" I pointed through the invisible plate glass, mightily on tiptoe for the confidence of this girl, but feeling somehow that she should be given the chance of delay.

The whole of Lake Louise had gone dead still. All of the silver ripple had been brushed away and in its place a reflected image of each sky-concealing wall, sparkling and diamond-cut as the reality above. The great blunt-topped mountains were packed upside down in a glass case, the central patch of blue sky far, far below them.

"Uncle Joe," said Et with firm courage, "that is just my mood. I've had to be turned upside down, along with all my ideas. My viewpoint was all wrong. But this is the place where doubts go—and faith comes."

"And faith comes," I whispered back, afraid that my voice might break her thought.

"I don't exactly mean faith so far as Dum's humbug attitude goes. I know that he's pretended —ever since Ellensburg—that he didn't care; but Dum's no good at pretending. He's only good at being, and at that he's been so good that I don't know how to make it up to him."

"You do want to make it up to him?"

"Yes, I want to. The spirit and flesh are willing. I've progressed to a place where I'm resolved to do fine things. That's a good start, isn't it?"

"It's a good finish," I confirmed solemnly.

Instead of speaking again she lifted her cheek from my hair and gazed with me fixedly out over the lake. I felt the small hand tighten and release on my shoulder once or twice, but she could not quite bring herself to say it, so I asked,

"Do you love him, Et?"

Her cheek returned to its resting place and she whispered huskily, "I just wanted to tell you first—before I told him, or auntie, or anybody."

Behind us there was a heavy step and a cough. Our heads pivoted like ventriloquist's dolls to see Dum coming towards us. Like an impulsive child Et jumped from the arm of my chair and ran to meet him.

"Tell me, Dum? Do you love your pet prejudices more than—"

"Don't say it!" I could hear him, and Et's voice broke off as though stopped literally. Thinking of it afterwards, it seems strange how I could have felt myself anything but a rank intruder. But such

simply did not occur to me. The voices were quite close, then less distinct, then gone.

"Yes, let's go then," Et was whispering tremblingly, "Right now, before breakfast or anything. . . . And you'll scold me and scold me for all my foolishness."

"Uh-hum!"

"And then I'll cry."

"Yes."

"And then—"

"Yes, and then?"

"Then you'll—"

"Shh-h!"

I continued for a long time looking out of the great window.

THE END

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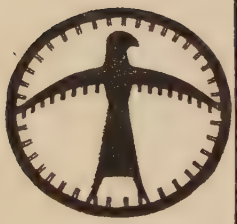

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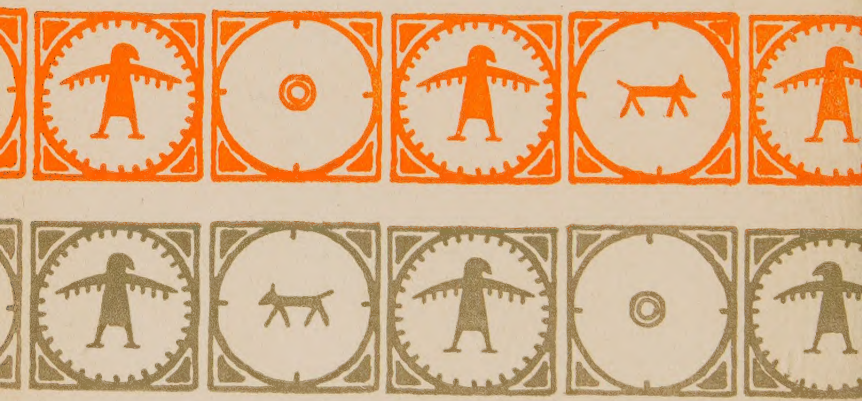

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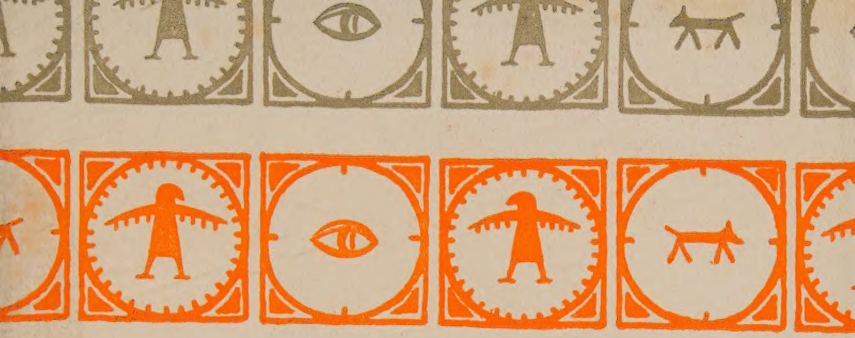

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